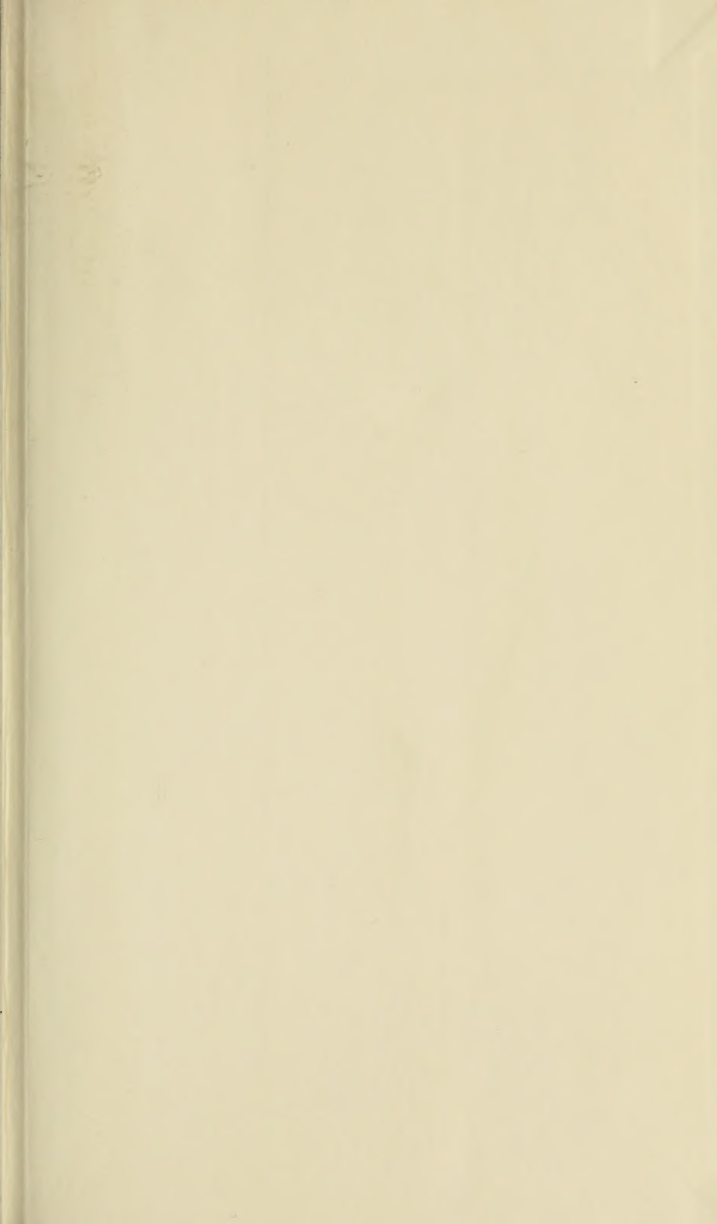


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**RECOLLECTIONS OF IMPERIAL
RUSSIA**



THE CHURCH OF SAINT BASIL, MOSCOW.

Frontispiece.

RECOLLECTIONS OF
IMPERIAL RUSSIA

By MERIEL BUCHANAN ::

Author of "Petrograd," "Tania," "White
Witch," etc. :: :: :: ::

WITH NINETEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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Recollections of Imperial Russia

CHAPTER I

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

IT seems useless and futile to attempt to write another book about Russia when so many hundreds have already been written and when, in spite of all their quantity and length, her secrets still remain unconquerable and unsolved. Radiant beauty and stark, hideous ugliness, gladness and sorrow, greatness and tragedy and brutal, savage cruelty—over them all she draws a veil of impenetrable mystery, smiling with soft, inscrutable eyes when people impatiently misjudge and condemn her.

I myself cannot even attempt to understand, far less explain, her wayward inconsistency ; all that I can do is to try, very feebly and haltingly, to paint in words all those different pictures of her that I have known and loved and read of. Glowing and jewel-coloured the pageantries of her past, like the splendid golden mosaics in her glorious churches, and dark and sad and terrible the realities of her tragic present.

Her history and legends are full of colour and romance and mysticism, mingled always with crime and unspeakable brutality. Her literature is great and wonderful, but almost morbid in its utter hopelessness ; her music, even in its turbulent gaiety, never loses its haunting sadness ; her climate is grim and desolating and depressing ; and always,

in everything, she will remain divided from us by her absolute dissimilarity and oppositeness.

In one of Claude Ahnet's Russian novels the heroine exclaims : " Êtes-vous sûr que l'Angleterre soit parti du monde que nous habitons, nous les Russes ? Ici, on ne comprend rien à rien. Chez eux, on sait à l'avance tout sur tout." And then, with true Russian inconsistency, she adds : " C'est reposant, mais comme cela me paraît vide."

Those words mark very clearly the division there is—the fundamental difference which so many people cannot realise. It is almost impossible for us, with our insular love of order and regularity, and of life laid down in cut-and-dried rules, to understand this obscure, confused impulsiveness and uncertainty in all things, and, puzzled and impatient, we pass judgment without pausing to consider the difference of nature, climate, and temperament that will always leave Russia an enigma and a mystery unsolved and incomprehensible.

The very first impression I had was one that is perhaps not excessively poetical, but I think it must always have forced itself with some intensity on any traveller getting out of the train at one of the Russian frontier stations. It was, in fact, impossible not to notice it, since it was a smell that met one as soon as one let down the carriage window, and I don't think there is any other smell in all the world quite like it. So overpowering and all-pervading was it that one thought despairingly that one would never get used to it ; but gradually it became so much part of one's life that one scarcely noticed it, and now I think of it almost with regret because it is so individual to Russia that it has become bound up with all my memories of her.

And yet it was not a smell of any one thing in particular, and though the Russian moujik took it with him

wherever he went, it was not really because he himself was unclean, as he invariably went to the public baths once a week, boiled himself in steam, and had himself beaten with birch rods afterwards by way of a rather drastic massage. No, it was not actually a smell of dirt: it was made up, I think, of high leather boots, of sheepskin coats, of cigarette smoke, of cabbage soup, and of sunflower oil, which was extensively used for cooking.

The other vivid memory I retain of our arrival at Wirballen is the picture of the Tartar waiter who served us in the Imperial waiting-rooms, which were always opened for an Ambassador. He was a minute little man with a totally bald head and a yellow, wizened face that was just like a gnome's. He spoke an almost incomprehensible mixture of English, French, German, and Russian, and he never walked, but always ran, with small, quick, trotting steps and flying coat-tails. He had been at the station for an uncountable number of years; he was there as usual the last time we passed through Wirballen in the autumn of 1913, smiling, bowing, scraping, fussing, and always glad to see one. Poor little yellow-faced man! I have often wondered what became of him when the great cataclysms of War and Revolution swept away all the old landmarks.

Of our arrival in St. Petersburg I can actually remember very little, except that it was a hopelessly grey day of early December, and that there seemed no light or colour anywhere. The broad spaciousness of the streets somehow intensified this general sense of magnificent dreariness. An early snowfall had melted and was turning to yellow slush; the river looked dark and sullen, with pieces of half-frozen ice floating slowly down towards the sea. The big red building of the Embassy at the corner of the Quay and the Souvoroff Square struck one at first as being more like a barracks than

a residence, and it seemed impossible that one could ever grow to look on it as a home.

That winter of 1910 happened to be a very late one, and for days the same bleak sky stretched above the same bleak streets, cold and grim and utterly cheerless. Then at last the real snow came, and everything was changed. The pieces of ice floating down the river from the Ladoga Lake thickened, got jammed together, froze into white, solid immobility. Here and there paths were smoothed and cleared from one shore to another. By the Winter Palace, where the old wooden bridge of boats had to be swung back every winter, and where the big new bridge was still in course of construction, a tramline was laid down on the ice, and a little electric car spun across the fastness of the imprisoned river. The dull, opaque greyness of the sky lightened, a pale sunshine filtered through and struck gleaming fire on the gold spire of the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul.

Sledges took the place of the rattling, noisy cabs and carts; a hush of peace and stillness settled over the town, broken only by the occasional hoot of motors, the clang of the tram-bells, the hoarse, warning shouts of the coachmen. Moujiks in white aprons and brown fur caps swept the snow in the streets, cartloads of it were thrown over into the Neva, the hard frozen surface of the pavements was strewn with sand and ashes. And slowly all the time the clouds lifted; a deep, turquoise-blue sky laughed above a new white world; the yellow and red and pink stucco houses struck gay, garish notes of colour; spires and domes shone with incredible brilliance; the frozen river under its covering of snow shimmered in a radiance that hurt one's eyes.

Vaguely I can detach certain individual pictures from the bewildering chaos of memories, and I think almost one of

the clearest of these is our coachman, Ivan. He was an enormous man with a square, black beard and slanting dark eyes. His long, sapphire-blue coat, shaped like a dressing-gown, was tied round the waist, lined with fur, and padded out like a balloon. It was the absolute duty of a Russian coachman to be as fat as possible, and, in addition, to have his coat filled out so as to add in every conceivable way to his size. Apart from the fact of its being necessary for the man's own sake, the original idea of this was, I think, that in the little open one-horse sleighs people sheltered themselves behind their coachman's back, and the broader that back was, the more protection they got from the icy wind.

In winter, Ivan wore a blue velvet three-cornered cap with gold braid and fur round it, and a little cockade of red, white, and blue in front, and in summer a queer little top-hat that was very low and squat, and always looked rather as if it had been sat on. He also had three broad gold stripes down the back of his coat, these being the insignia of an Ambassador's coachman, a Minister's having two stripes and a Secretary's only one. Ivan drove with both arms stretched stiffly out in front of him, the bright blue reins wound round his fur-gloved hands, and he would always, when nearing his destination, urge on the two long-tailed horses to a terrific pace, and then, throwing himself backwards, would bring them to an abrupt standstill, during which process they naturally very nearly sat down.

He was filled also with the absolute and immovable conviction that everything must make way for an Ambassador's carriage, and he would accordingly drive straight through the traffic, with a hoarse shout to trams, motors, and carts to leave the road clear, which, needless to say, they were not always obliging enough to do. He never seemed to mind

how long one kept him waiting, but would sit for hours in cold or heat, rain or snow, sometimes fast asleep and sometimes smoking a short clay pipe, which he would stuff hastily inside his coat as soon as one appeared. But I never saw him knock out the ashes, and I often wondered what happened to a fully lighted pipe in the padded warmth of his voluminous clothes. Several times he came out dead drunk, and was given notice ; but he inevitably came the next day, asking to be forgiven, and swearing with tears in his eyes that it should never happen again, and somehow he was always believed and taken back.

In a Russian household there were always a countless number of servants, and ours, though not purely Russian, seemed to be no exception, for beside the *chasseur*, the porter, the butler and footmen, the chef and sous-chef, Ivan, the chauffeur, and the housemaids, there were an indefinite number of *moujiks* who did everybody else's work as well as their own. I don't know how many there were in the kitchen and stables, but besides the big silent *moujik* whose sole duty it was to carry logs of wood from room to room, I can well remember the two little gnome-like brothers who flitted about the house, beating carpets, cleaning windows, and generally doing odd jobs. They were both tiny, stunted men with thick curly hair, and I was never quite sure which was which ; but I believe the eldest one was called Feodor, and I know that he remained on with us during the war and long after his brother had been called to the Front.

One of them had a wife, a hopelessly plain, pale-faced slip of a woman, who seemed to be a sort of general scrub, charwoman, and under-housemaid. For a long time it didn't seem quite clear to which brother she really belonged, and I well remember my poor mother's horror when she discovered that they all three slept in the same room.

Eventually, however, she was identified as the younger brother's wife, and when he was called to the Front I believe she went back to her village.

But the most important member of the household, and the one who ruled all the others with a rod of iron, was William the chasseur. William's special business in life was to look after my father and to accompany him everywhere, armed with a huge sword with which, I assume, he was expected to defend him against the assaults of possible enemies ; but he seemed to add to this particular duty the responsibility and care of the whole house and family.

It was William who drew up the list of visits that had to be paid every afternoon. It was William who knew where everybody lived, and who knew all the At Home days of Ambassadors, Ministers' wives, and Court ladies by heart. It was William who always looked after our coats and over-shoes, and would not allow anybody else to touch them. It was he who, when we went to the Ballet, led the way to our box, or, when we went shopping, told us which shops to go to, or, when we travelled, arranged our journey and took our tickets and looked after our luggage, and, when we went out, always came with us on the box of the carriage or the motor, and was furious and terribly hurt if he was left behind. He was by birth a Lett, and before the war we always spoke to him in German ; but from the day war was declared he firmly refused to speak another German word, and we then discovered that he spoke perfect and fluent English.

William wore a neat, dark green uniform with gold epaulettes, and, on ordinary occasions, a military cap or a helmet with dark green plumes, rather like a Bersaglieri ; but if we were going to some official function or audience, he would exchange this for a cocked hat with white feathers, in which he looked nothing less than a field-marshal. He

shared both Ivan's and the chauffeur's view that everything must give way to an Ambassador's carriage, and the language he used when sometimes a cart impeded our progress sounded formidable and volcanic, though luckily we did not always understand it.

In his way he was most distinctly an autocrat, and would insist with a wooden and impassive face on what he considered to be the right thing. For instance, if after a long round of visits, my mother suggested that we could go home, William would often say severely, "It is Countess So-and-So's At Home day, and Your Excellency has not yet been to her." Wearily my mother would reply that Countess So-and-So could be really left till next week, but William remained entirely adamant. "I think it would be better to go to her to-day," he would say, and we generally found that in the end we had to give in to him.

Or sometimes, calling on some humble person whom William (I am afraid he was not quite devoid of snobbishness) considered not worthy of the attention, he would salute respectfully when my mother told him to be sure and ask whether Madame So-and-So were at home, disappear into the house, and, coming out again in a few minutes, would announce with a perfectly expressionless face that Madame So-and-So was out, and that he had left cards. We knew, of course, that he had never enquired at all; but it was useless to argue with him, and so, as usual, we let him have his own way.

Very uncertain and confused are all these old memories of mine, and I find I cannot arrange them in any order or sequence, cannot tell when and how I first saw St. Isaac's great golden dome, or the huge red building of the Winter Palace, or the Cossacks riding past with long lances slanting against a steel grey sky, or the first Ballet in the great blue

and white Opera House, or the first religious ceremony in the Kazan Cathedral.

Certainly the bigness of everything was enormously impressive, indeed, almost overwhelming, and perhaps it was this very immensity that made it so difficult for one to feel at home in a city that seemed in some strange way impregnated with the bigness, the genius, and the cruelty of the man who first dreamed of this northern capital which was to be the window towards Europe of his huge, uncivilised Empire.

Always, too, even on the most sunny days, there was a sense of tragedy, a shadow that was indefinite and intangible, but that seemed to creep up behind one like some evil, haunting spirit, stretching out a claw-like, threatening hand over the golden domes, the gay stucco houses, and the great palaces along the quays. It had often been said that a curse lay over Petersburg, and the old belief was that the Neva would one day rise and swallow the town, leaving only the spire of St. Peter and Paul sticking out of the waste of grey waters. There were some people even who pretended that on still evenings they had seen the head of some Gargantuan, frightful monster lift itself out of the sullen waters and look with evil gloating eyes on the town it would one day devour.

Countless times in history the Neva had risen, flooding the quays, submerging the lower quarters of the town, sweeping away the wooden houses and rendering thousands homeless. There are many old pictures and prints of Petersburg with the streets turned into canals and people going about in boats, and strange and sometimes gruesome stories are told of the floods that at various times threatened to destroy the town. Once, when the Winter Palace was in danger, a cow and two calves were discovered

in the moujiks' quarters on the top floor. Another time, so great was the army of rats seeking refuge from the rising water, that the Empress Catherine herself went round the Palace placing traps to catch them. It was during one of these floods, too, that the beautiful Helena Tarakanoff, who was said to be the daughter of the Empress Elisabeth, was drowned in her cell in the Fortress, where for twelve years Catherine's fear and jealousy had held her prisoner.

Once the spoilt beauty of the Florentine Court, Charles Radziwill, who schemed to be King of Poland, sought her hand in marriage, but Catherine, divining, so the story goes, his intriguing ambition, sent Alexis Orloff with three ships to the coast of Italy. And Alexis, faithful to the "Mother's" orders, ingratiated himself in Florentine society, lured the unfortunate girl on board his flagship, and brought her back to Petersburg to be shut in the lowest cell of the Fortress and left there, till at last the waters of the Neva topped the small open loophole and totally submerged the wretched cell, while the jailers turned a deaf ear to the prisoner's cries and entreaties to be saved.

Frequently during the years we were in Russia, if the wind blew up from the sea, the smooth flowing river would be turned into a heaving mass of yellow waters, lashing themselves against the bridges and parapets and rising with an alarming velocity, while with every inch they rose the cannons from the Fortress boomed a warning to those living in the low-lying quarters on the islands. I remember one night especially, when it seemed that the monster hiding in the waters would once more rise and devour the town. It was during the winter months, and the river was chained in a frozen mass of ice, but a gale of wind had been blowing all day from the sea, added to a blinding snow-storm, which made it almost impossible to go out. During the night the

gale became a hurricane, and, under their frozen, imprisoning fastness, the waters rose, lifting the ice with them, and in their mighty volume and strength breaking the thick blocks asunder.

All night long the cannons thundered, the church bells pealed, the mad wind howled up the desert of snow and ice in the Gulf of Finland, and inch by inch the heaving, cracking mass of the river rose, like a huge, white, threatening animal straining at its leash. Then, just when the swaying ice-blocks seemed as if they would top the stone parapets of the quay, the wind changed, and slowly the turbulent waters sank back into their prison, and the danger was over, though already on the Petersburgskaya side many of the low wooden houses had been inundated, and everywhere the cellars and basements were flooded.

But always the menace of the river was there, and those who remembered the stories of the bygone floods would shake their heads and recall the old legend of the enormous walnut tree that in long ago days grew on the square between the Fortress of Peter and Paul and the little wooden Cathedral of the Trinity. On its trunk it bore the marks of all the different floods, and it was said that before Petersburg had been built, and this tree stood solitary and lonely in the desolation of marsh and swamp, the river one day had risen so high as to submerge even its topmost branches. And when, against his subjects' wishes, Peter began to build his new capital, the whisper was spread abroad that one day the river would again rise to the height of the walnut tree, and that then Petersburg would be destroyed. Hearing these stories, the Tsar, who feared neither God nor man, had the tree cut down and those who had circulated the legend cruelly punished.

And yet, with all his genius, all his power, all his absolute

autocracy, Peter could not make his subjects love the town he forced them to build. The damp, evil-smelling marshes all round, the miasmas of the swamps, from which hundreds died of malignant fever, the ever-present danger of floods, made the nobles over and over again seek flight to their beloved Moscow, only to be followed, bound, and brought back by the pitiless order of the giant who ruled them, till at last, with the passing of years, Petersburg was recognised as the capital of Russia.

In the dim, golden dusk of the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul the body of the great Emperor rests in peace ; but always it seemed to me that his spirit, with its strange mingling of incredible genius, warm-hearted generosity, and savage cruelty, still brooded over the city he had so loved. Looking up at the marvellous equestrian statue by Falconet, where Peter dominates the Neva, I have almost fancied that the horse, brought back on its haunches, was checked only for a moment in its furious gallop towards Eternity—that the wind still swayed in the folds of the Emperor's cloak, that the outstretched arm moved in a proud, sweeping gesture, as if it said, " This town is mine, and I hold it still."

On frosty mornings when the trees in the Alexander Garden were a fairy-land of silver tracery, and the great dome of St. Isaac's swum in a soft pink haze, on still, cold nights, all blue and white beneath the faint, chill stars, on summer evenings, magic in dim, opal-coloured loveliness, always that statue seemed to stand out, vivid and alive, commanding and threatening, with outflung arm and the thunder of trampling hoofs.

CHAPTER II

SOCIETY

THE first Russian ball I ever went to was at the house of Monsieur Stolypine, who was then Prime Minister. A few years earlier, when he had been living out on the Islands, there had been an attempt on his life ; the anarchist's bomb, however, exploded prematurely, wrecked the balcony of the nursery, and very seriously injured Monsieur Stolypine's eldest daughter. But though she was permanently lame, she adored dancing, and the big white house, that was so carefully guarded by the police, was often the centre of a great deal of gaiety.

We had only just arrived, and therefore I knew nobody ; but one was never allowed to feel out of it, or to suffer from a lack of partners, owing to the custom of having at every dance a master of ceremonies, whose duty it was to direct the quadrilles and cotillon, and to see that no girl ever sat out. There was no question, even, as to whether one wanted to dance or whether the unfortunate young man on whom one was foisted wanted to be one's partner. One was asked before every quadrille whether one was engaged ; if one said no, some outwardly submissive, but very likely inwardly rebellious, young man was led up to one, meekly clicked his heels, and asked whether he might have the pleasure of dancing with one.

There were never very many waltzes, the one-step and

two-step were considered slightly immoral, and most of the evening was filled up with quadrilles, where everybody sat round the room on little gold chairs and waited for their turn. Generally these quadrilles began in a somewhat formal and stately manner, but they invariably ended at a hectic pace and in a scramble that rather resembled kitchen lancers. After two or three quadrilles and a few waltzes, the cotillon, which was the most important item of the evening, and without which no ball was complete, was announced with a great deal of fuss and preparation. Here again the unfortunate master of ceremonies had to find partners and *vis-à-vis* for everybody, and if there was an overflow of men, and if one was sufficiently popular, one was even occasionally allowed the luxury of two partners, and after the little gold chairs had once more been put round the room, sometimes three or four deep, everybody at last settled down.

The cotillon figures differed, however, very little from those of a quadrille, except that there were always a few waltzes and a mazurka in between, and a wonderful succession of favours of ribbons and flowers, and it was the flowers that were perhaps the most remarkable feature of all. High hedges of huge pink roses were brought in, over which girls reached up on tip-toe to grasp the hand of some unseen partner. Masses of golden-yellow daffodils were pushed round in huge market baskets. Heavy bunches of Parma violets were handed round, sweet-scented jonquils and narcissus, drooping red roses, branches of frail white lilac.

All the way from the South of France in specially heated carriages these flowers were sent to wilt and wither in the blaze of electric light, carelessly passed from hand to hand. When one knew the price of each pink rose, each golden daffodil, one could not help wondering at the vast sums of money

squandered, and by the time one had carried one's big armful of fragrant sweetness into the carriage, and from the carriage into the house, the cruel, bitter frost would blacken the delicate petals, and however carefully—sleepy and tired though one was—one slit the stems and put them in warm water, the next morning would find the white lilac withered, the roses drooping, the violets curled up, the daffodils and narcissus and tulips hanging tired, wistful heads.

But the cotillon, though it lasted for ages, was not quite the end of the evening, as after it was over there was still a big supper, which one sat down to with one's partner, and where the chaperones and older people were placed according to rank. With its formality and set courses it was really more like a regular dinner, and it lasted almost as long, and though there was always a great deal of gaiety at the small, round tables, by the time it was over one was generally only too glad to go to bed, and only very energetic couples, or those who happened to be very much in love, started dancing again afterwards.

There was in Petersburg society a very marked line of division between the girls and the young married women. What was called a "Bal Blanc" was attended only by girls, very few foreigners were ever invited, and rows of alarming-looking mammas sat round the room, and one was supposed to go up, shake hands, and make a little curtsy to every one of them, or to be presented to any one of them one had not met before. But when one did not know them very well, they all looked exactly and hopelessly alike, were always dressed in black or dark grey, had a fur scarf round their shoulders, wore wonderful pearls, and had their hair incredibly smoothly brushed back from their foreheads, and I was always committing the unforgivable sin

of being introduced two or three times over to the same old lady during the same evening, or else going up to one I did not know at all and being received with a surprised and disapproving stare.

Sitting out at a Bal Blanc was, of course, unheard of. A waltz was always enormously long, and one danced once or perhaps twice round the room with some young man, who then brought one back to one's place, clicked his heels, murmured a polite "Thank you," and vanished. If one was lucky another young man took his place immediately, and the same formula was repeated, and if, greatly daring, one took more than three turns round the room with the same young man, the mammas looked at one severely and made remarks in sibilant whispers. Hence it was only at supper or when one sat on the little gold chairs round the room that one was able to exchange any conversation, and then it was always interrupted, and generally at the most critical moment, by some shouted order from the red-faced master of ceremonies to get up, join hands, or advance and retreat in single file.

Another characteristic of a Bal Blanc was that there was very seldom an orchestra, its place being taken by an old grey-haired Tappeur, who was almost an historical institution, as he had played in the ballrooms of Petersburg for an uncountable number of years. The mammas, sitting round the room, would occasionally look at him with a light of sentimental recollection in their eyes "How beautifully he plays!" they would say, swaying a little in time to the music; and then, "I shall never forget the night he played at our ball when . . ." and, whispering to each other, they would float off on the tide of long-ago memories, while their daughters danced to the old man's rhythmical music, and he watched them with wise, grave eyes that

seemed to know all the secrets of youth and the sorrows of the human heart.

At the balls given by the young married women, on the contrary, everything was far less conventional. In the first place, there were no mammas sitting round the room with eagle eyes alert to watch how many times one danced with the same man. Quadrilles were few and far between, and Colombo's Band gave one as many one-steps and waltzes as one could wish. Only the best dancers were invited, a few of the most popular diplomats, some of the older officers of the Guard Regiments, and one or two Poles, who always came for the winter season. Sometimes Goulesko's Gipsy Orchestra played in the way only gipsies can play—a way that made even bad dancers feel that they had wings to their feet and their heads in the stars. There was, of course, always the inevitable cotillon, with marvellous flowers ; but it never lasted long, and the supper was entirely informal, and took place early in the evening so as to allow dancing afterwards.

Looking back now, it all seems so incredibly far away as to belong to another life and another world. The big golden rooms, so softly heated and lighted, the scent of flowers and cigarette-smoke and perfume, the marvellously polished floors, the absence of any crowd or jostling, the perfect dancing, the wonderful, haunting gipsy music—and outside, the still, frozen night that seemed, somehow, to press against the windows, and Russia—immense, unreadable, mysterious, and always a little terrifying.

There were naturally every year also a few enormous balls where everybody was invited, and the big rooms blazed with colour and shimmered with the gold braid of uniforms, the glitter of decorations, the fire of jewels. But here, too, the girls kept to one side of the room and the young

married women to another, and the same men hardly ever danced with both, as they both had an entirely separate set of partners.

The time for dancing was, however, very short in Petersburg, as Lent was kept with rigid strictness by the Orthodox Church, and there were seldom any balls before Christmas, when the bazaar held by the Grand Duchess Vladimir officially opened the season. Everybody seemed to have a stall at this bazaar, and everybody else seemed to be selling, so that one wondered how there was anybody left to buy. However, all the rich merchants and business people came in crowds and spent money with lavish generosity, so that for the three afternoons and evenings that the bazaar lasted it was always thronged with people, and, in spite of its atmosphere of gaiety that seemed to make it more a Society function than anything else, a great deal of money was made and many good causes were helped and supported.

The first year we were in Petersburg roller-skating was the craze of the moment. A rink had been built on the corner of the Champ de Mars, just opposite our house, and if one did not roller-skate, or at least go and look on at roller-skating, one simply did not exist in Society. In the afternoons the rink was packed with a rather mixed assembly of foreign diplomats, rich Russian merchants, artists, officers, students, professors and doctors, with all their various families, and the crowd was so great that it was almost impossible to move. A certain section of Society therefore decided to forfeit a little of their sleep and go in the mornings, and it became the recognised thing that one should spend an hour before luncheon skating as strenuously as one's courage or proficiency allowed.

Some of the younger Grand Duchesses and a few of the smartest married women were nearly always there. Richly

bedecorated Generals, who wished to be considered dashing and fashionable, were led carefully round by the professionals. One or two Ambassadors, looking on it as combining a little mild exercise with a not unpleasant social obligation, put in an occasional appearance. A few young Secretaries of Embassies and some of the most popular officers, escaping for a few moments from barracks or chancery, would swing out into the rink, dash round at hurricane speed, do surprising and perilous tricks, and vanish regretfully back to their respective duties. And at the little round tables, mothers chaperoning their daughters, Ambassadors' or Ministers' wives and some of the older ladies of the Court, would sit and listen to the music, sip pale, very much sweetened tea, and discuss the latest engagement or divorce.

One night a supper and a ball on roller-skates was given by the Grand Duchess Cyrill, who hired the rink after it was closed to the general public at midnight. I remember that we had been to some big official dinner that evening, and it was rather a wearying experience to come home at eleven, change from evening into day clothes, and start out once more. But the supper and ball was a great success, and the quadrille on roller-skates, though mixed with a certain amount of danger, as a good many of the dancers were mere beginners, was decidedly amusing, and at moments extraordinarily funny.

Roller-skating, however, was a craze that was too violent to last for long. A year later already fewer people went, and in the afternoons the attendance became more irregular, exotic, and egregious. One or two scandals took place—I vaguely remember some story of an officer shooting himself or somebody else in the middle of the rink. Anyhow, the place got a bad name, and was shortly afterwards closed and then pulled down.

In Russia, Lent begins on the Monday instead of on the Wednesday as it does with us ; the last week of Carnival was always therefore crammed with balls, and on the Sunday, which the Russians called a *journée folle*, every hour that remained was made use of in an entertainment, that generally began with a luncheon, continued with games in the afternoon, and ended up with an early dinner and dancing that had to stop punctually on the stroke of twelve.

Very often this day was spent in the country, and one year the Grand Duchess Cyrill had a big party in her mother-in-law's palace out in Tsarskoe. For this, everybody started by special train at eleven in the morning. In the hour before lunch, somebody built a huge snow-man in the gardens and a terrific battle of snowball followed. In the afternoon we drove in a long line of sledges and troikas through the quiet, frost-bound woods of Pavlosk, returning with a huge appetite for tea. Between tea and dinner we played games—hunt-the-slipper and blind man's buff, and bumps, when I remember my father and the Grand Duchess Olga, the late Emperor's sister, both sitting down on the same chair, which collapsed with an ominous creak and deposited them both none too gently on the floor. Then, after tidying as much as we could, we had dinner, followed by a dance and a small cotillon, and finally returned to Petersburg by a sleepy train at half-past twelve.

During Lent the time was taken up by receptions, bridge-parties, official dinners, and an endless succession of the inevitable At-Home days ; and I remember that I cordially disliked all this category, and had not always in those days enough sense of humour to overcome my boredom and see the funny side of things. At the time, so much of it meant merely official restriction and etiquette, but looking back now at those never-ending At-Home days, I can only

see them as rather comical or intensely pathetic in the light of all that has happened since.

I can still picture them all so clearly : the heated drawing-rooms with their stiff gold chairs, their innumerable photographs, their countless ornaments, their atmosphere of scent and hot tea and cigarette-smoke. The old ladies with their immaculately brushed hair, the three or four Court gentlemen with bald, round heads and somewhat indefinite faces, the rows of young girls very much on their best behaviour, and always one or two oddities one never met anywhere else because nobody ever asked them out, and their only form of social gaiety consisted in going to as many At-Home days as possible, eating as many cream cakes as they could swallow, and gathering up all the scraps of gossip they heard.

And always, in every drawing-room, the same cups of sweet, weak tea, the same everlasting oft-repeated questions : "Do you like being in Russia ? And how do you support the climate ? " I used to try and vary my answer to the last question as much as I could, just for the sake of not always saying the same thing, but even if I hadn't liked Russia I should have had to say that I did, and when one had been asked the same question about six times the same afternoon, it was sometimes very hard to look enthusiastic.

And then the monotony of the official and diplomatic dinners—though they are, I think, very much the same all the world over. A long table covered generally with a bad mixture of silver, a heavy mass of inartistically arranged flowers, rather sweet champagne in tall, narrow glasses, a mixture of languages, a buzz of forced conversation, everybody trying to look amused and not always succeeding, and all the time the women surreptitiously examining each other's clothes, making remarks and taking notes as is the custom of

women in all countries. "Madame So-and-So has a new dress on. I suppose she got it from the little dressmaker on the Spalernaia, but she's sure to say it came from Paris ! . . . I am sure Countess L——'s dress is the blue one we all know so well, dyed and redone ! . . . Madame X has done her hair a new way—it makes her look older, but I think I'll try it when I get home !" And after dinner the long hours when the women sat on stiff chairs and made laboriously sweet conversation to each other, while the men drifted into corners to talk politics, and the clock seemed as if it would never get nearer eleven, when it was possible for the most important lady to make a move.

If Easter came early in the year there were again a few balls ; but a great many people would already be leaving, most of them going to Paris or the Riviera, and a few to their estates in South Russia or their villas down in the Crimea. And, as the days lengthened, there would be tennis and boating out on the Islands, or long drives in the pearl-coloured twilight, a few desultory luncheon parties or dinners, a picnic, perhaps, or an excursion in a little steamer on the Gulf of Finland.

Early in June all the Guard Regiments moved out to the Summer Camp at Krassnoe, about twenty miles from Petersburg, and their wives and families followed them, living in little wooden houses, passing the time with an endless amount of gossip, the complications of rather difficult housekeeping and small dinners and parties at the wooden theatre and open-air restaurant. A good many people also had villas at Tsarskoe, Strelna, or Peterhof, and during the summer months there was a constant coming and going between these places and a certain amount of intermittent entertaining, impromptu dances, dinners, and suppers.

In September, however, everybody who could left

Petersburg, for the autumn is the worst time of all in Northern Russia, when the grey days succeed each other in endless and hopeless succession and the heavy clouds seem as if they were never going to lift, when the daylight hours grow shorter and briefer, and the river is the colour of dark steel, and even the golden spires and domes seem to lose their radiance.

But, like the glowing days of summer, those bleak, dull days would pass. The first half-frozen flakes of snow would drift down from the cold grey sky ; the first ice would float down the sullen river ; the boxes at the Ballet would be filled with familiar faces ; groups of laughing girls, accompanied by English governesses, would walk up and down the quay in the mornings ; the great length and breadth of the Nevsky would be crowded by carriages, with bearded coachmen in bright-coloured velvet caps, blue and crimson and orange and green. Motors would flash by, driven by chauffeurs in great fur coats like shaggy bears ; Court carriages, with coachmen in bright scarlet livery and cocked hats, would forge their way through the dense mass of traffic, which the policemen with their little white wands controlled and stemmed, while the air vibrated with the hoarse cries of the drivers shouting out their warning to unwary pedestrians.

And over it all always the sound of bells : the tolling majesty of the bells of St. Isaac's ; the golden chime of the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul half drowned in the roar of traffic from the Troitzky Bridge ; the silver clamour from the Church of the Resurrection, built on the spot where the Emperor Alexander II. was killed by a Nihilist bomb in 1881 ; and cracked and solemn and gay and sad and sweet, the bells of all the other churches, with their coloured cupolas and domes. And whispering in the air, sheltering against the houses, fluttering almost under the horses' feet, flocks of

pigeons, who were considered sacred in Russia on account of the Holy Ghost always being pictured as a dove.

So if I shut my eyes I can still see Petersburg on some bright wintry morning, with the yellow Imperial flag flying against the ice-blue sky, and the sound of a military band somewhere along the quay.

CHAPTER III

THE COURT OF RUSSIA

EVER since the Japanese War and the Revolution of 1905, the Emperor and his family lived either at Tsarskoe or Peterhof, and the gorgeous ceremonies that had always been the feature of the Russian Court were practically a thing of the past. The only time anything resembling the magnificent spectacles of old days took place was at Epiphany, when the Emperor took part in the ancient function of the Blessing of the Waters.

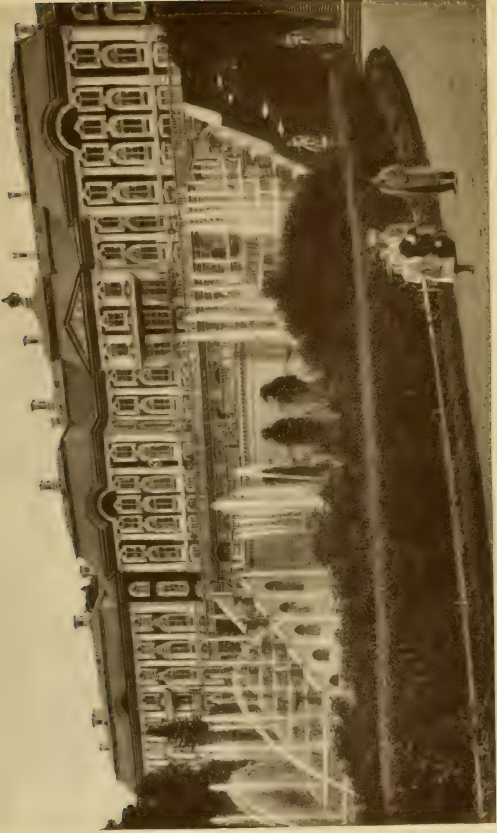
A few years before our arrival at Petersburg, one of the cannons firing the salute from the Fortress had been charged—whether by accident or intention was never fully explained—with shrapnel, which peppered the Pavilion where the Emperor was standing, tore one of the flags to ribbons, and shattered a window of the Winter Palace. Luckily nobody was severely hurt, and throughout the whole incident the Emperor never moved or turned his head, but for several years after that he was strongly advised not to attend the ceremony in person. During the last few summers, however, cholera had raged in Petersburg, and the Russian people—superstition always strongly mingled with their faith—declared that it was because the Little Father had not blessed the water of the Neva.

Therefore, in 1911, it was decided that the Emperor was once more to come up to Petersburg for the Feast of the

Epiphany, though this time the guns that were to fire the salute were placed on the Island of the Bourse, and trained down the river instead of across. And, smile as one may at the childish belief of the people, it is certain that the following summer there was no recurrence of the violent cholera that had for several years ravaged the capital.

The day of Epiphany was, I remember, one of brilliant winter sunshine and icy wind. The yellow Imperial Standard flying on the Fortress blew taut against a sky of clearest, frozen blue, golden spires and domes flashed with almost unbearable brilliance, flags waved and fluttered from all the palaces along the quay; on the white, frozen surface of the Neva a little wooden pavilion had been built, covered with crimson velvet hangings and gold braid, and close to it a round hole had been cut in the thick ice, showing the black sullen water of the river.

In the Winter Palace the warm, hushed stillness seemed to dimly vibrate with a subdued murmur of voices, a rustle of dresses, a soft, silver jingle of spurs. Court servants, in gorgeous liveries with little round hats, covered with ostrich feathers, perched on one side of their heads, lined the vastness of the great staircase. A mass of uniforms that were indescribably dazzling thronged the enormous rooms through which we passed. The St. George's Hall with its marble pillars, the Throne Room with deep, red velvet, the Field Marshals' room, the Armorial saloon with its massive gilt pillars—in every one of them colours, that took away one's breath, moved and shifted in varying kaleidoscopic brilliance. Hussars in white and gold with scarlet dolmans slung over their shoulders, officers of the Chevaliers Gardes in white with shining silver breastplates, a Cossack in vivid crimson, another in deep blue, officers of the Gardes à Cheval looking like living figures of Lohengrin in white and



THE PALACE OF PETERHOF.

gold, a colonel of some line regiment in orange tunic, some others in emerald green.

A flood of sunshine was pouring through the long glass windows in the enormous Gallery, where all the Diplomatic Corps were assembled; but, after the marvel of glowing colours that had dazzled one, the shimmer of the women's dresses, even the gold on the diplomatic uniforms, looked almost sober and dull. For a time there seemed nothing much to do but to look out of the windows, pity the soldiers and police on guard in front of the Palace, examine all the other women's hats and gowns, and try and remember who one had shaken hands with.

Then, at a given signal, everybody pressed to the long open gallery at one end of the room, and a sudden hush fell as the procession of Grand Duchesses and Court ladies, headed by the Dowager Empress, passed through on their way from the Imperial Chapel to the inner rooms of the Winter Palace. The blaze of exquisite jewels, the resplendent old Court dresses with their stiffly-embroidered gold petticoats, their long hanging sleeves and trains of velvet, their crown-shaped kakoshniks and soft white veils, made one feel that just for a moment one had been transported back into some old fairy-tale where princesses still wore gold and damask and jewelled diadems.

Much of the details I have forgotten, but, all the same, I can still remember the Dowager Empress' long sweeping train of cream-white velvet with its deep border of priceless sable. And I can recall, too, the soft, rose-coloured velvet overdress of one of the young Grand Duchesses; the vivid, cornflower blue of the Grand Duchess Cyrill—the marvellous sapphires and diamonds that flashed on her kakoshnik; the olive green of the older Court ladies; the ruby velvet of the Demoiselles d'Honneur.

Slowly, in silence, with the rustle of their heavy trains, the fire of their jewels, they passed, the heavy gold-studded doors at the end of the gallery closed behind them ; but for a moment still, the silence that had watched their passing held, and women looked at each other and sighed, thinking, perhaps regretfully, of the commonplace insignificance of modern clothes.

Then, once more turning to the other side of the room, everybody pressed close to the long windows to watch the ceremony outside. The colours of the Guard Regiments that had been blessed in the Chapel were carried out, and the Emperor's slight figure crossed the quay on his way to the wooden pavilion, followed by the Grand Dukes, the gentlemen of the Court, the Cossacks, and a crowd of other officers. The priests, in their gorgeous vestments, began the service in the pavilion ; dimly through the thick glass window we could hear the chanting of the Gospel ; then the Emperor, followed by the priests, stepped down to the ice, the silver cross was dipped three times in the water, the flags were sprinkled, the cannons thundered their salute ; gold epaulettes glistened in the sunshine, bright-coloured uniforms stood out vividly against the snow ; the bells of St. Peter and Paul rang out a silver chime across the frozen river.

One might have thought one was looking at the page of some old manuscript of Russian history when the Tsar descended from the Kremlin, accompanied by the Strelitsii in their many coloured kaftans, by the Court magnates and Boyars in their robes of fur and cloth of gold, and the grey bearded Patriarch received them on the ice of the river Moskwa, and, in the little floating wooden structure specially constructed, crossed three times over the open space of water, which was stirred all the time in order to prevent it

freezing. Rituals and pageantries of long-ago days handed down almost unchanged through the centuries. One looked across the snow-covered river to the Fortress built by Peter the Great, and one thought in one's ignorance that the Russian Empire was a thing immutable, unchangeable, and firm.

The religious ceremony over, old Court chamberlains and generals thankfully covering their bald heads, the procession turned back into the Palace, and once more we crossed the room to the long open gallery, a sudden hush falling on the babel of voices that exclaimed and explained in all languages as the Emperor passed through on his way to join the Grand Duchesses. All of them remarkably tall men, the Grand Dukes who accompanied him might have made his slight figure seem almost insignificant had he not somehow been possessed of such dignity and majesty that, when one bent in the stereotyped Court courtesy, one seemed to be doing obeisance, not only to his title and power, but to something else that was hard to explain.

Perhaps, if anybody had asked me what that something was, I should have said that it was a look in his eyes, that, blue-grey like nearly all the Romanoff's eyes, had a wonderful expression of steadfast tranquillity, and then, having got so far, I should not have been able to explain any further.

But the big gold-studded doors closed behind him too, an old Court chamberlain opened the great centre doors, and we were told that lunch was ready. The Ambassadors and Ambassadors were placed according to rank, but everybody else was allowed to sit or stand as they pleased; gay parties were formed at the little round tables, and there was a general scramble and a great deal of laughter.

And, meanwhile, at the enormous buffet, one could see a little Chinese secretary diving under the arm of a huge

colonel of Hussars to get a sandwich ; an Austrian, in a gorgeous old Hungarian uniform, deep in conversation over a plate of cold chicken with an officer of the Chevaliers Gardes ; a secretary of the Spanish Embassy slowly eating some fruit salad while he listened to the excited explanations of an Italian, who was describing his first experience of a party out on the ice-hills ; a Bulgarian and a Serbian, stretching out for the same glass of champagne, frowned, and then gave way to each other politely ; a superb Cossack officer made room for the Japanese Military Attaché with a stiff, frozen formality ; a Greek and a Turk discussed the rival merits of chocolate and vanilla ice ; and old gentlemen who held some courtesy titles at Court made the most of their opportunity of eating lobster salad, chicken-patties, and whipped-cream.

There were also often special services for the Emperor's birthday, nameday, or various other commemorations. Then the Kazan Cathedral, with its great Corinthian columns, its jewelled ikons, its torn French flags blazoned with the Imperial eagles of Napoleon, seemed like a casket of pure gold overflowing with the fire of precious stones. The green and purple and crimson vestments of the priests, the richness of uniforms—military and diplomatic—the shimmer of decorations, the flickering light of a thousand candles, the faint blue haze of incense ; and, above it all, the marvellous deep intoning of the priests, the wonderful, clear singing voices of the choir.

I remember, too, a gala performance at the Marinsky Theatre for the Romanoff Tercentenary Celebrations, when the three tiers of boxes flamed with the blaze of jewels, and the huge *parterre* was filled with Court officials in scarlet uniforms. Rather like a gigantic field of poppies they looked when, with one movement as it seemed, they rose

and turned towards the Imperial box to welcome the Emperor's entry. On the occasion of the Romanoff Tercentenary there was also a ball given in the Assembly Hall of the nobles which the Emperor and Empress opened in a formal polonaise, and where the Grand Duchess Olga, fair and graceful in a soft white dress, danced every dance and enjoyed herself as simply and whole-heartedly as any girl at her first ball.

I have a vivid recollection of her, standing on the steps leading down from the gallery to the floor of the ball-room, her hair shining golden against the crimson velvet curtains, her cheeks softly flushed, her blue eyes very bright, while one or two of her cousins, and several other young officers, all clamoured for her attention.

A few other ceremonies there were. Some reviews on the big sandy plains of Krassnoe, when the Russian army passed in seemingly unending lines before the Emperor, and the ringing shouts of the soldiers cheered the Little Father, for whom so soon they were going into battle and whom, alas ! they were going to desert and betray. Then the funeral of an old Grand Duchess in the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul, an interminable service of three hours, candles that guttered and flared perilously near crêpe veils, the low solemn chanting of priests, the open coffin with the high baldachin of black velvet and ermine ; and in the dusky shadows all round, the tombs of sleeping Emperors. And every year the small parade of the Gardes à Cheval in the big riding-school of their barracks, when, in the faint, grey, dusty light, the Emperor and all the Grand Dukes reviewed the serried lines of men, who, in their golden helmets and breast-plates, seemed like shifting gleaming ribbons of flame.

But the glory of the old Russian Court had been shattered like a cup of glowing jewels, the broken pieces still retaining

their old-time colour, but the pattern and symmetry destroyed for ever.

The Byzantine splendour of old Muscovy was a strange medley of Eastern voluptuous intemperance and cruelty, and an almost monastic austerity. The Kremlin itself, with its cluster of churches and palaces huddling together, is a symbol of how closely religion was bound up with the everyday life of the Tsars ; and, indeed, most of the gorgeous pageantries of those days were of a religious character. The Festival of the Patriarch was one of the chief feasts of the year, when the Tsar and all his Court attended an enormous banquet in the Patriarchal Palace, and on New Year's Day, there was a public celebration in the Square before the Cathedral of the Assumption.

There was the ceremony of the Blessing of the Waters, and the quaint festival of Palm Sunday, when the Tsar led the Patriarch, mounted on a donkey, from the Red Square up to the Cathedral of the Assumption. And whenever war was declared there was a solemn service, when the Tsar betook of the Sacrament, and laid the plan of campaign at the feet of the Holy Ikon of the Virgin of Vladimir, and the Patriarch blessed the generals and officers, and prayed for the success of the Russian arms. On the declaration of war in 1914, this ceremony was once more held. For the last time the Emperor of all the Russias descended the Red Staircase of the Palace and went slowly through the kneeling crowds of his subjects to the Cathedral of the Assumption, and for the last time the golden bells of the Kremlin rang out their prayers for victory above the huge concourse of people who wept and prayed, and bent to kiss the passing shadow of the Little Father.

The day of the Tsar of Muscovy in the Middle Ages was mapped out in an almost unchanging routine. Having risen

at four, he went to early Mass, and then held a reception of courtiers, Boyars, members of public offices, counsellors or envoys to foreign parts, who all gathered at the foot of the Red Staircase ; those who had the superior right going up into the Ante-Chamber, the rest, according to their respective ranks, waiting on the steps or in the courtyard. Then came another service in church, which lasted for two hours ; and after the midday meal, the Tsar retired for a siesta. At four, he rose and went to Vespers, after which there was a banquet, followed by a religious play, or else the rest of the evening was spent listening to singers, harpers, or story tellers, and watching the antics of the Court fools and dwarfs. Occasionally, too, the Tsar went hunting or hawking ; and the savage sport of bear-fighting in an enclosed pit was a favourite pastime of the Court.

The women of old Russia were looked on practically as Eastern slaves, and some of the proverbs and sayings of those days clearly show with what general contempt they were treated. " A horse must be guided with a bit and a woman with threats " is one example ; and another : " One must fly from the beauty of women as Noah fled from the deluge." The Terem, or women's quarter in the Kremlin, was guarded almost more severely than a Turkish harem ; and it is said that when a Tsarina was ill, the room was darkened for the visit of the doctor and her pulse felt through a veil of gauze.

Peter the Great's mother, the beautiful Nathalie Narishkin, and his vigorous, strong-minded Aunt Sophie Alexeievna were the first who dared openly to protest and rebel against this treatment, and Peter himself, enforcing his laws of Western civilisation on Russia, altered the position of women for ever. It was Peter, too, who abolished the old semi-Oriental clothes worn by Russians up till his day, and issued a decree that all his subjects, with the exception of the clergy,

were to shave, or pay a tax, even sometimes going so far as to cut off the cherished beards of his protesting and indignant Boyars with his own hands. The great reformer who transferred the Capital from Moscow to Petersburg hated the old Eastern splendour of the Court, and had no taste for the formality and sumptuous luxury his ancestors had so cherished. The old Ukase which forced people meeting the Tsar in the streets to descend from their carriage in order to salute him was abolished, and Peter even severely chastised one or two loyal subjects who persisted in doing it. Building palaces for his descendants and favourites—the Emperor himself lived always in small, simple houses; and it was Menshikoff who gave all the banquets and formal receptions, revelling in the magnificence which his fabulous wealth made possible.

When Peter died and his second wife succeeded him as Catherine II., the Court became incredibly immoral and debauched, and with Peter II., the son of Alexis, deteriorated still further. Menshikoff had honestly tried to educate the boy, who, graceful and intelligent, had at first seemed full of promise; but the intrigues of the Dolgorouki caused the downfall of the great favourite, Peter's engagement with Marie Menshikoff was broken off, and the man who had governed Russia, and had a thousand slaves to do his bidding, was banished to Siberia, and died in misery and the utmost poverty.

Left to his own devices, thinking only of hunting, drinking and pleasure, the young Emperor let the reins of Government fall, deserted Petersburg, flirted with his beautiful young aunt Elisabeth Petrowna, became engaged to Catherine Dolgorouki, and finally died of smallpox at Moscow in 1730.

The Crown of Russia, snatched at by greedy hands,

swayed above an abyss of darkness ; the great Empire Peter had sought to reform seemed likely to slip back into even greater disorders. The Regency is said to have been offered to Eudoxia, Peter's first wife, the Dolgoroukis made a vain and spasmodic attempt to gain the Throne for Catherine, a few voices called loudly for Peter's daughter Elisabeth, but finally the Duchess of Courland, who was a daughter of Peter the Great's half-brother Ivan, was elected Empress.

Vulgar and common in her tastes, slovenly in her dress, Anna Ivanovna reigned for ten years, and the Court in her days must have borne a strange resemblance to some travelling circus—hunchbacks, dwarfs, dogs, and animals of all kinds swarming in the palace ; the Empress amusing herself by shooting at sparrows from the windows, or, lying half-dressed on a couch covered with bear-skins, listening to story-tellers or singers. She definitely, however, made Petersburg once more the capital of Russia, living in the palace of Count Appraxin, while the Winter Palace, which had fallen into disrepair, was being rebuilt.

On her death in 1740 she left the Throne to Ivan, the baby son of her niece Anna Leopoldovna, who had married a Duke of Brunswick, under the Regency of Bühren, who, said to have started life as a stove-lighter, had then become manuscript writer ; and bringing some papers for Anna to sign when she was still Duchess of Courland, had won his way into her favour, and made himself ruler of Russia. But, like so many of the great favourites, Bühren was to tread the way of exile to Siberia while Anna Leopoldovna claimed the Regency for her son, until, a few months later, another *coup d'état* convulsed the Palace, and the Crown of Russia was seized by the soft white hands of Elisabeth, the only remaining daughter of Peter the Great.

Though for the last few years she had made very few

public appearances, and had been living in a way that caused scandal and gossip even in the utterly dissolute society of those days, she was still possessed of the radiant, voluptuous beauty which won all hearts, and had so stirred the youthful passion of Peter II. During her reign the Court of Russia attained a brilliance which, till then, had been unknown. Her love of gorgeous apparel was inordinate, and she was said at one time to have possessed fifteen thousand dresses of silk and five thousand pairs of shoes. She had a passion for ceremonial display, and delighted in masquerades, for which she generally put on men's clothes, which showed off her magnificent figure to perfection.

Refusing to marry on the ground that she had never got over the death of Charles of Holstein, to whom she had been engaged, she made her nephew, Peter-Ulric of Holstein, her heir. Serious questions of policy and affairs of State were neglected while the Empress chose new lovers; and festivals of all kinds succeeded each other in endless succession till, in a sudden spasmodic fit of repentance, Elisabeth set off on a pilgrimage to some distant shrine or convent, her reluctant suite forced to follow her.

And under all the incredible magnificence there was always a hopeless discomfort that almost amounted to squalor. In her memoirs, the Grand Duchess Catherine describes her bedroom in the Palace at Moscow that led into a small innerchamber where seventeen of her ladies and maids were herded together and which was alive with vermin; while in the Winter Palace at Petersburg there was an alcove just behind her bed where her husband kept six of his hounds.

When, later, Elisabeth died and Catherine became sole Sovereign of Russia, her Court rivalled in grandeur and refinement that of Versailles. For the big balls at the Winter Palace, twenty apartments were thrown open; the Russian

nobles seeking to outshine each other in the splendour of their costumes, the magnificence of their jewels ; Polish, Hungarian and foreign uniforms adding to the wealth of colour. At a given moment the doors of the vast room would be flung open, and Catherine, in a stiff dress of cloth of gold, blazing with diamonds, would make her solemn entry.

Unlike Elisabeth, Catherine herself loved simplicity, seldom drank anything, and was sober and frugal in her meals, delighting in small, informal receptions at the Hermitage, where conventions and etiquette were forgotten, and games of forfeits of all kinds were played. A list of rules was hung at the door, bidding all those who entered, leave hats and swords outside, forget formality and arrogance, be gay without becoming overbearing, sit or stand or walk as they pleased, talk as they liked, but not too much or too loud, argue without heat, not yawn or sigh, eat as they pleased, but not drink to excess, and when they left let all they heard pass in at one ear and out at the other.

During the reign of Paul, the Court was subjected to a form of tyranny that was almost a reign of terror. The Emperor's love of inspiring awe and fear made him insist on his courtiers going down on one knee to salute him ; he issued strict orders that the new round hats were never to be worn, and even gave instructions concerning the dressing of ladies' hair.

Alexander I., his life shadowed for ever by the death of his father, had not much love for Court ceremonies ; but with the accession of his brother Nicholas, autocratic and powerful, magnificent entertainments of all kinds were again introduced. In 1837 the Winter Palace was entirely destroyed by fire, which, starting in a flue while the Emperor and his family were at a theatre, raged for thirty hours. Nearly all the treasures were, however, saved, and the Palace

was rebuilt in three years on almost exactly the same lines as the original edifice. So, through the reigns of Nicholas I., of Alexander II., and of Alexander III., in spite of wars in the Crimea and the Balkans, in spite of the sudden upsurging of the Nihilists and their conspiracies and bombs, in spite of Palace intrigues, the death of great Emperors, and the swift, shifting passing of days, the Court still maintained its luxury and splendour.

At the beginning of Nicholas II.'s reign, the balls at the Winter Palace were perhaps the most gorgeous spectacles seen in modern times. About 3,000 guests were invited, and the wealth of all the different uniforms, the fire of priceless jewels and decorations, the moving throng of shifting colours in the vast rooms, must have made a picture hard to forget. The Emperor and Empress always opened these balls by a formal polonaise, going three times round the room and changing partners at each turn—the Emperor taking the arm of one of the Grand Duchesses or Ambassadors, and the Empress doing likewise with a Grand Duke or Ambassador. At midnight, an enormous sit-down supper was served, the Emperor going from one table to another, and stopping at each one individually to converse with his guests.

There were also somewhat smaller balls, where at supper the tables to seat about sixteen persons were each surmounted by an enormous palm tree, so that the whole vast room looked like a forest of palms; and then there were the small, informal dances at the Hermitage, the private performances in the theatre there, the formal celebration of St. George's Day, as well as many other banquets and receptions of all kinds.

Most of all, however, the Emperor had always been devoted to a country life, and, during the latter years before

the war, his days were passed in a routine of the utmost simplicity at Tsarskoe or Peterhof. Working with untiring conscientiousness from an early hour in the morning, he would receive foreign diplomats, members of the Government, representatives of all classes, and spend the rest of the day in the quiet round of the family circle, playing games or going for long walks in the gardens. But it was the white Palace of Livadia, in the Crimea, that he loved the best ; for there, above the blue sea, among the flowers of the wonderful gardens, the shadows that surrounded his path must have seemed further away, and, listening to his children's happy voices, perhaps his face lost some of its grave, fixed sadness.

In the hideous tragedy of Siberia, the grim awfulness of the days that, recorded, read like an incredible, ghastly nightmare too frightful to be true, the most heart-breaking note of all, I think, is the marvellous, unselfish love that united the Imperial Family. And for me the saddest memory of all is the picture of the Grand Duchess Olga, radiant and laughing at the ball in the Assembly Hall of the Nobles, or, sadder still, that other vision I have of her riding through the Park at Peterhof one early-summer morning with her sisters, the Grand Duchesses Tatiana and Anastasia, the light of youth and glowing health on their faces, and the clear sound of their laughter echoing back through the sunny dew-drenched woods.

I have, too, unforgettably impressed on my mind my earliest recollection of the Emperor many years before we ever went to Russia. I was, at the time, about eight or nine years old, and my father was accredited to the Court of the Grand Duke of Hesse, the late Empress's brother, at Darmstadt. What the exact occasion was I have forgotten, but I know that, in a frilly white frock, I was taken as a great treat to see a special performance of "Hänsel and Gretel."

Our box was next door to one of the Royal boxes, and when we first came in my mother whispered to me that the slight, grave-faced young man who was sitting just next to me was the Emperor of Russia.

In one act of the opera the witches' cottage in the wood blows up with a terrific bang, and, though I knew the story and was prepared for it, the noise was louder than I expected and gave me a tremendous start. I don't think I screamed, but I certainly shut my eyes very tight and held on to the edge of the box, and when, after a few seconds, I dared look up again, I found that the Emperor had turned round and was smiling at me. Child though I was, the singular charm of that smile and the softness of the grave blue eyes stirred me strangely, and when, later, my mother told me that the Emperor had said that he had quite understood that I was frightened at the noise, and had added, "Please tell her that I hated it, too," I was overcome with pride and delight.

Still earlier than this was my first meeting with the Empress. It was shortly after we had arrived at Darmstadt, and when she was still only Princess Alix of Hesse, and one sunny summer afternoon my nurse took me for a walk in one of the Royal Gardens to which my father and mother had been given the key. We were sitting on one of the benches when a slight, graceful young lady in deep mourning passed by. Fascinated by her beautiful face and wonderful golden hair, I stared with wide-open eyes, and, pausing with a little smile, she began to talk to my nurse who had hastily got up, and then turning to me said she and her brother were giving a tea-party to a lot of children in the gardens, and would I like to come too. I was, in those days, so well brought up that I must have come very near to being a little prig, and I can still hear myself saying

sedately that I wasn't allowed to go out to tea without my mother's permission.

The beautiful lady in black, however, only laughed and said I needn't worry, it would be quite all right, and eventually, sending my nurse home to fetch my mother, took me with her—her sweetness and charm making my heart go out to her in quick, childish devotion. Shortly after this I had a serious illness, and though I believe Princess Alix came very often to sit with my mother, I was, I suppose, too bad to know much about it ; but one day I clearly remember waking up from semi-unconsciousness to find her lovely face looking down at me, and I remember, too, her saying to my mother in a whisper, " Look, she smiled—she actually smiled at me."

So soon were the responsibilities and cares of a great position, the suspense of incessant danger, the shadows of calumny and suspicion to dim the radiant beauty of her youth, and harden all her softness and glowing colour. Suffering always from an unconquerable shyness, she was accused of being stiff and cold ; while the shocks and terror of the Revolution of 1905, the constant anxiety for the little Tsarevitch's health, had a serious effect on her nerves. Influenced by Anna Vyroubova, she believed that Rasputin was a holy man, and that he had the gift of healing which alone could save her son. She refused to listen to any of the advice or warnings given to her, was set in her idea of preserving the autocracy, and convinced that whatever happened the Army would remain loyal.

The rumours that charged her with being a violent pro-German, the slanders that imputed unspeakable things in her relations with Rasputin, are all only iniquitous lies ; and whatever other indictment there may be against her, surely the accusing voices must fall into silence as the smoke from

the murderous rifles rises and fades on the vast grey horizon of Siberia.

So the happy laughter of the young Grand Duchesses, the slight figure of the Emperor, the tragic, beautiful face of the Empress, the old Court of Russia, with its glitter and pomp and majesty, pass and vanish in darkness and chaos. And yet amidst the ruin and emptiness of desolation, the shadows of the old long-forgotten days still seem to linger. Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Catherine, the furtive figure of Paul, they shift and move and fade away like pictures on a screen. A splendid Cossack in scarlet standing in one of the rooms of the Winter Palace ! An old Court Chamberlain, baldheaded, a little bent under the weight of his heavy, gold-braided coat ! A tall, slim girl in the ruby velvet robes of the *Demoiselle d'Honneur* that gave to every girl elected to this honour an independent rank, by which she very often took precedence of her own parents ! The figure of a young Grand Duke in a dazzling uniform, the blue ribbon of St. André across his breast, the golden *aguillets*, that marked him as *aide-de-camp* to the Emperor, on his shoulder !

The smoke of spattering machine-guns, a rabble of fierce-eyed, dirty men hide them from sight. The yellow Imperial Standard with the double-headed eagle lies torn and stained with blood on the ground, and the red flag of so-called Liberty flutters above the bullet-scarred walls of the Winter Palace.

CHAPTER IV

PETER THE GREAT

ONE glorious summer evening during the first year of the war, I remember we hired a little steam yacht and went out to Peterhof, having obtained permission to land at the harbour and go over the palaces. We started out late in the afternoon, round the islands, past the Point of Yelagin, the Yacht Club and the shallow reeded marshes, and headed across the gulf towards Kronstadt, while behind us Petersburg lay shrouded in misty heat and dust, with the slim spire of St. Peter and Paul rising, a flame of gold, into the sky.

The waters of the gulf were as smooth as a sheet of glass; Kronstadt, with the round dome of its Cathedral, the grim, brown walls of its fortifications, seemed wrapped in impenetrable silence, and might almost have been an island of the dead swimming in a haze of softest lilac on the turquoise-coloured sea. Slowly we steamed by under the silent shadow of the fortresses, and on across the gulf to the wooded shores of Oranienbaum, past the pink palace of the Duke of Leuchtenberg, till at last we reached the landing-stage of Peterhof.

Above the silver cascades of fountains rushing down the falling terraces to the sea, rose the great Palace, with its painted walls of cream and red, its three ranges of windows glittering in the low sunshine, and the five golden domes of the chapel shimmering against the soft dim sky.

Built by order of Peter the Great by the French architect, Leblond, in imitation of Versailles, and enlarged by Elisabeth, it is perhaps a little ostentatious, almost too ponderous and formal with its sweeping terrace, its vast staircases, its great gaudy rooms, its Chinese lacquer, its marble and gold. It is the shining vista of the blue Gulf of Finland, the rushing music of the waterfalls, and the green dusk of the park where silver fountains whisper that make the charm of Peterhof. And it is in the little palaces of the Hermitage and of Marly, in the white cottage of Mon Plaisir, with its terrace on the sea, its blue-tiled kitchen and simple furniture, that one finds the intimate memories of Peter the Great, who hated and detested all formality and sumptuous grandeur.

So often has the story of Peter the Great been told, and under so many different names of Brute and Genius, Murderer, Libertine or Reformer has he been shown to posterity, that, in the end, one does not clearly know which he is when he seems in his greatness to be them all. Terrible, relentless, and absolutely pitiless in his fury, unmeasured in his excesses, coarse in his revelry, untiring in his work of regeneration, inexhaustible in his energy, almost child-like at times in his simple gaiety, capable of very great devotion—great, anyhow, in all that he did, either good or evil.

When, in 1671, the Tsar Alexis married the beautiful Nathalie Narishkin, ward of his favourite Matveieff, Russia was still an almost Oriental Empire; Eastern in the magnificence of its palaces, its churches and its jewels, but uncivilised and dreading the inroads of civilisation; shutting itself within the rose-red walls of the Kremlin, with its churches, its priests, its soldiers and its nobles; keeping its women shut up in the Terem; drinking, fighting, praying in an ignorance that did not want to be enlightened. The man who was to revolutionise his country was born in 1672, but there were

insistent and recurrent rumours that Nathalie, in reality, bore a daughter, and that a German surgeon replaced it by a boy; and over and over again it was asserted that the kindly, weakly Tsar Alexis could never have been the father of the turbulent, vigorous giant who succeeded him.

When he was three days old the baby was measured according to the ancient custom which decreed that the image of the Patron Saint of each prince born to the Royal Family should be painted on a piece of wood cut to the exact size, and Peter was then found to be nineteen and a quarter inches long, and five and a quarter inches broad. Later, when he grew to his full size, he measured seven feet exactly, and was enormously broad and strong, with muscles of iron.

During the first few years of his childhood he was surrounded by loving care and incredible luxury. He had jewels and furs in profusion, sheets of white silk embroidered with gold, an army of dwarfs as slaves, miniature ponies to draw his brightly-painted carriage. In 1676, however, Alexis died, and the terrors and shocks inflicted on the child's receptive mind during the revolts and insurrections that followed hardened and coarsened his sunny-tempered nature, darkening his days and filling his nights with terror, leaving him also with a perpetual nervous twitch, and subject to occasional fits of convulsion, that were said by some to have been caused by some secret poison administered by his enemies.

On the death of Alexis, Theodore, his son by his first marriage with Maria Miloslavski, succeeded him; the Miloslavskis, therefore, came back into power, Matveieff was banished, and Nathalie was forced to fly with Peter to the castle of Preobojensk. Theodore, however, only reigned a few years, and when he died, Peter was brought back to

Moscow to be chosen as Tsar, in preference to Theodore's younger brother, the half-blind weakling Ivan. But a few days later, the Strelitsii, urged on by Peter's masterful, intriguing aunt, the Tsarevna Sophia, revolted, and the little boy had to watch the carnage that ensued, and was finally crowned joint-Tsar with his step-brother Ivan, under the regency of Sophia.

Ambassadors to the Court of Moscow in those days spoke always of Peter's good looks, his quick grasp of a subject, his intelligence and vivacity ; but the Archbishop of Novgorod, when he was presented, quailed before the direct, almost fierce, look of the child's eyes, as if already he knew that the boy who looked at him so haughtily would one day overthrow the supreme power of the Church in Russia. Terrible and ruthless as Peter was, those years of his childhood can be held accountable for much when one thinks of the immorality, the coarseness, the duplicity with which he was surrounded ; the constant plots there were against his life ; the dangers that threatened him always on every side. Perhaps the happiest days were those he spent at Prebojensk, to which Sophia's intriguing jealousy once more exiled him.

The stories of his parades and games of soldiers, of his work as a carpenter, the legend of the old English ship, stranded, Heaven knows how, at Ismailoff, and supposed to have given him that first passionate craving for the sea, are well known, and have a certain picturesqueness that one loves to associate with him when one cannot help turning in disgust from some of the other pursuits and pastimes of his youth, as well as from the brutal acts of his later life.

When he was barely eighteen he was married to Eudoxia Laphoukin, a marriage that almost from the first was a tragic failure. Gentle, dull, intensely religious, she hated all Peter's modern ideas and reforms, while he tired and

fretted impatiently under the drag of her boring company, and at last, when Ivan's death made him sole ruler of Russia, exiled her into a convent and forced her to take the veil.

Poor sweet-faced Eudoxia, colourless, insipid and tiresome as Peter found her, she yet had her romance, her love-story, that only, however, intensified the tragedy of her unhappy life. In the exile of her convent, Major Gleboff, who was said to be one of the handsomest men in Russia, took pity on her poverty and loneliness, and tried, by sending her furs and comforts of all sorts, to relieve the hardness and monotony of her life. Friendship and gratitude soon turned to love on the deposed Tsarina's side, and her starved nature expanded in an outburst of almost hysterical devotion. The letters written at her dictation to Gleboff were imprudently kept by him; and when, twenty years later, during the trial of Alexis, Peter, searching for proofs to still further implicate his unfortunate son, heard of Eudoxia's supposed intrigue, his passion-distorted mind seized on these letters and, with hideous savagery, tore the poor romance to shreds.

Tortured with every form of cruelty, impaled on an icy March day, wrapped in furs so as to prolong his life, dragging on his suffering for more than twenty-four hours, Gleboff stoically and heroically refused to utter one word that could in any way further implicate the woman who had loved him; and, baffled in his fury, Peter could only send Eudoxia into a still grimmer seclusion in another convent near Lake Ladoga. Later still, she was imprisoned in the Fortress of Schlüsselberg till after the death of Peter and his second wife Catherine, when the doors of her prison were opened and she was received in Moscow by the son of Alexis who had succeeded to the Throne. But her eyes that had shed so many tears could no longer bear the light of day, and when the final sorrow of her grandson's death left the world

empty of all joy, she retired of her own accord into a convent.

So, a pitiful, pale, wavering ghost, she stands amongst those others who, crowding near to Peter, stretch out accusing hands, and in low-whispering voices remind us of his crimes, his inhumanity, his Homeric violence.

In their kaftans of crimson, of emerald green, and deep cornflower blue they follow him, an army of shadows, the ghosts of the Strelitsii Guards, cut down in their hundreds, swept away and annihilated completely, because the clear, far-seeing mind of the Great Reformer saw in them an ever present danger and menace to his plans of regeneration—a part of the old Russia that would always be his enemy.

A creation of Ivan the Terrible, the Strelitsii were practically of the same standing as the Prætorian Guard of Rome or the Musketeers of France. They numbered altogether twenty regiments of eight hundred men each; they had their own suburb in Moscow; they were kept and paid by the State; in war-time they were the rear-guard and vanguard of the Army, in peace they took the place of police in patrolling the streets, were called up to put out fires, or to settle disputes, and were used as guards of honour on special occasions. But their force and strength were in themselves a danger to the Tsar they served, and though they were his protection against foreign foes within his Palace walls, they might at any moment take possession, hack him to pieces, and set up a Tsar of their own choosing. Always they were a power to be reckoned with—a menace the Tsar could never afford to neglect or ignore.

Peter had never forgotten that day when they clamoured below the windows of the Kremlin, demanding to see his half-brother Ivan, whom they believed murdered. When at last, to show them that it was not true, his mother, holding him by one hand and Ivan by the other, went out unto the top of

the Red Staircase, the little boy of ten looked down at all those threatening bearded faces, at the bared arms that brandished swords and pikes, and must have shrunk back, covering his face with his hands, when old Prince Dolgorouki, going to the head of the Red Staircase, tried to placate the furious rabble, and was seized by a soldier who had swung himself up, dragged down and brutally cut to pieces.

During the three days of terror that followed, Peter must have shared his mother's anguish when one by one the Narishkins and Matveieff were torn from her, tortured, and put to death. In the golden dimness of the Terem he must have wept with her when finally she was forced to surrender her favourite brother Ivan Narishkin, who, having communicated, went quietly out to his murderers, holding a Crucifix before him.

All this the young Tsar remembered. He knew, too, the unpopularity of the reforms he was introducing ; he knew that the Strelitsii would be the first to rise against him, to murder him if need be, place his Aunt Sophia on the Throne, and push Russia back into the shadows of barbarism. It was when he was on his first foreign tour to Holland, England, and Vienna that he heard of the approaching insurrection against him, and hurried home, determined to stamp out the ever-threatening danger once for all.

The torture chambers of the Palace of Preobojensk, the massed executions in the Red Square at Moscow, show him once more the inhuman, implacable savage, a monster who knew no pity and no compassion, who himself even handled knout and axe because there were not enough men to do his bidding. But half measures did not satisfy Peter. The Strelitsii were an impediment in his path—as long as they existed the new Russia he dreamt of would not be safe—so he swept them away with a wholesale, inexorable thoroughness

that made his subjects cower in abject terror of his wrath. "What man is this who rules us?" The question was often repeated in scared whispers, behind fast-locked doors: "Is it anti-Christ who has wrested to himself the Crown of Holy Russia?"

But with inflexible perseverance the iron hand held the murmuring in check. There were conspiracies to overthrow him, plots against his life, insurrections, disturbances of all kinds, that all, however, ended in failure; while from the shores of the White Sea to the Caspian, from the Neva to the Volga and back again to the Baltic, Peter travelled with inflexible determination to civilise and reform his giant Empire. The old style of beginning the new year in September was abolished, the doors of the Terem were flung open, the women of Russia who had been treated as Eastern slaves were given their liberty, the old, barbarous laws of marriage were reformed, social reunions were encouraged, dancing was introduced into Society, the Navy was born, against all opposition Petersburg was built and proclaimed the capital.

And all the time the war with Charles XII. of Sweden dragged on interminably, and there was, too, a war with Turkey, which nearly ended in disaster when the Russian Army was surrounded by Tartar hordes on the shores of the Pruth. But at last, in 1721, peace was signed, and Peter was definitely given the title of Great Gossedar, Emperor of all the Russias; the title of Tsar, in spite of its resemblance to that of Cæsar, being really very little more than a derivation from the old Tartar princes.

His subjects might complain and murmur, the nobles might refuse to acknowledge his reforms, the Church might call him anti-Christ and blasphemer, Petersburg might be nearly swept away by floods, the indomitable will of Peter



Photo by

PODOL PORTION OF ANCIENT KIEV.

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forged its way straight on, through obstacles, unpopularity, and superhuman difficulties, ruthlessly sweeping away everything that stood in his path.

That pitiless harshness did not even in its inexorable, uncompromising severity spare the son, whose ghost stands foremost amongst the accusing, shadowy throng of victims darkening the glory of the great Emperor's reign. The magnificence of Peter's work for his country, the story of his achievements which might have been written in gold on the pages of history, will always be stained with blood and shame ; for whatever was the mystery surrounding the death of Alexis, nothing can wipe away the fact that his father was directly responsible for it.

Erratic, capricious, weak and vacillating, a dreamer with bursts of almost fanatical religiousness, Alexis, the son of the unhappy Eudoxia, had been born in 1690, and, ever since his childhood, there had been an impassable gulf of misunderstanding, fear, dislike, and impatience between him and his iron-handed father. Alexis dreaded and disliked Peter's innovations ; he loved the patriarchal palaces, the gorgeous churches, the narrow streets of Moscow, all the mode of life, the customs and manners of old Russia that were being gradually stamped out.

In vain his father tried to make a soldier of him, tried to instil into him a little of his own superabundant energy, the boy only failed lamentably ; his nerves and health weak and feeble ; his fear of his father forcing him into every sort of deceit and crookedness, causing him even, when at one moment Peter ordered him to draw out some plans and problems of mechanics, to wound himself in the right hand in order to escape an examination which he knew himself incapable of passing.

In 1711, he married the Princess Charlotte of Wolfenbüttel,

and, for a short time, it almost seemed as if the union was to be a happy one ; but Charlotte, with her languid grace and delicate charm, had not the strength of mind to keep Alexis to her or to help him mould his life on saner, stronger lines. More and more the old Russian party were gaining a hold on him ; more and more he was slipping into dissolute self-indulgence, was constantly incapacitated by drink, and finally had the Finnish servant girl Afrosina publicly installed as his mistress.

The secret conflict between him and his father seemed to reach a crisis when, in 1715, his wife died in giving birth to a boy only a few days before a son was born to Peter and his second wife, Catherine. In the letter the Tsar wrote to Alexis at this time he enforced on him the necessity of either reforming or abdicating from the succession to the Crown, accusing him of being, in his present state, unfit to carry on the work that had been begun. " As I have not spared my own life, nor those of my subjects," Peter added in his usual point-blank, unvarnished style, " so I shall not spare yours. Better a deserving stranger than an unworthy son."

With abject humbleness, Alexis sent back a reply agreeing to abdicate, but his father, perhaps disarmed by his ready acquiescence, perhaps relenting and willing to give him another chance, came to no definite decision, and left for a long tour abroad, leaving behind him another letter for his son, in which he gave him six months to make up his mind either to reform or become a monk. Punctually at the end of the time, however, he wrote to him again, curtly commanding him to join him at once and take up the duties of Heir Apparent, or else to retire definitely into a monastery.

Terrified at the idea of the gloom of monastic life, equally afraid of joining his father, Alexis listened to the bad

advice of certain of his followers and committed the fatal error that was to lead to such appalling tragedy. Announcing to Menshikoff that he was going to meet his father, he left Russia, but, having crossed the frontier, he turned, and instead of attempting to join Peter, fled to Austria, and arrived in Vienna in a pitiable state of panic to beg the protection of his brother-in-law, the Emperor Charles VI. For the latter it was an uncomfortable predicament, for he could not afford to make an enemy of Peter, and Russia was at all times a dangerous neighbour. The pitiable terror of Alexis, however, at last induced him to give him shelter in the old Castle of Ehrenberg, allowing him to keep Alfrorsina, disguised as a page, and a few other trusted followers, later even transferring him to Naples in order to remove him still further from his father's wrath.

Peter's half-sister, Maria Alexeievna, when she met Alexis on the Russian frontier and heard of his projected flight, had cried out in horror. "Where do you think you can hide yourself?" she exclaimed. "*HE* will find you anywhere." Her words proved themselves quickly and terribly true, for, all too soon, Roumantsioff and Tolstoi, the emissaries of his father, tracked down the terrified Prince, forced themselves into his presence, and with a fabric of lies and threats and promises—that at one moment assured him of his father's forgiveness, at another warned him that Charles would no longer protect him, that Peter was on his way to Naples, and that Afrosina would be taken from him—undermined his feeble, trembling resistance, and finally induced him to accompany them. So, with tears in his eyes, Alexis left the blue bay of Naples with its sunshine and freedom, its brown-faced fishermen and moonlit nights, and started back to the darkness and terror that awaited him, his two gaolers smuggling him through Vienna and

not allowing him an interview with the Emperor Charles, who might still have tried to save him.

Slowly the last grim act of the tragedy unrolled itself. In the Kremlin at Moscow, before a solemn assembly, Alexis—prostrate, pitiful, his shaking hands plucking at his quivering lips—flung himself at the feet of his terrible father, begging, with tears and sobs, to be forgiven. In the Cathedral of the Assumption—a furtive, trembling figure, surrounded by all the grandeur and pomp—he made a public and open act of abdication, swearing allegiance to Catherine's baby son, who was proclaimed Heir to the Throne.

A few days later he gave the names of those who had sympathised with him and encouraged him, and in the pitiless and terrible inquisition that followed, Peter, urged on it seemed by some monster of implacable fury, showed himself not the reformer and civiliser of an uneducated people, but the brutal barbarian who revelled in unspeakable cruelty. Once more the Red Square before the Kremlin was stained with blood, once more pikes with severed heads were erected round the Lobnoie Mest (or Place of the Skull), and yet neither terror, nor torture, nor executions could gain the definite proof of conspiracy he sought for, and at last, accompanied by Alexis, he returned to Petersburg.

It seemed at first as if the wholesale persecutions were over ; Alexis perhaps sustained himself with the hope that at last he would be allowed to live in peace and happiness ; but in April, Afrosina, who had remained on in Italy for her confinement, arrived in Petersburg, and was promptly sent for and severely interrogated by the Emperor.

A common, uneducated, self-seeking peasant, she was only too ready to win favour by repeating all Alexis' foolish thoughtless words. He had spoken of a party being formed which would put him on the Throne after Peter's death ;

he had said he would abolish the Navy, give up Petersburg, do away with all reforms and innovations. It was still no conclusive proof of a conspiracy, but it was enough for Peter, who saw that as long as Alexis lived no formal act of abdication, not even the exile of a monastery, would protect his crown from the intriguing grasp of the reactionary party, who would always look on Alexis as the rightful heir. Once more the Russia of his dreams was in danger ; to save her this man, even though he was his son, must be destroyed.

On the 14th of June, Alexis was arrested and imprisoned in the Fortress, an assembly of priests and high dignitaries was convened, and men who trembled before the Emperor's frown sought through the Scriptures to find authority giving him the power to punish his son by death. All through the golden days of June, when the Neva was as blue as the sky above it, and the fires of sunset and sunrise burnt through the hot, still nights, the huge granite-like figure of Peter stood over his trembling son and listened to the pitiable confessions that the cruel knout wrung from the twitching lips—confessions that even now gave no proof of having gone beyond having wished the death of his father, in cowering fear and dislike having, perhaps, prayed for it : thoughts and prayers alike never having materialised into any plan of action.

Then at last, on the 26th of June, the official report was given out that, having heard the sentence of death read out to him, the Tsarevitch Alexis had succumbed under a stroke of apoplexy, only recovering sufficiently to beg his father's forgiveness before he died. For eight days the body was exposed in the Cathedral of the Trinity near the Fortress, for eight days the priests prayed for the peace of the Tsarevitch's soul but the true manner of his death remained a mystery that has never yet been completely solved.

Countless stories, of course, were told, which all contradicted each other : some stating that Peter had actually killed his son with his own hands ; others holding Catherine responsible, saying that she had sent poison to Alexis, others again declaring that he had been beheaded by Peter's orders and the head sewn on again, that his veins had been opened, that he had been suffocated in his sleep.

And when Peter came to the Cathedral of the Trinity, in the light of the flickering candles, the haze of incense, the shimmer of jewelled ikons and priests' embroidered vestments, did he look down on the white, still face of the son whose life he had made one long nightmare of fear without one tremor of sorrow or remorse ? They say he wept at the funeral, and yet the day after his son's death he had attended a *Te Deum* celebrating the anniversary of the Battle of Poltava, and a few days later he was present at the launching of a new ship, accompanied by all his Ministers.

And yet, with all his violence and his harshness, he adored his second wife, Catherine, and when their little son Petrouchka, or Chichenka as he was sometimes called, died at four years old, the Emperor was almost inconsolable. His letters to Catherine are full of real affection, and of confidences that are at times almost boyish in their candid spontaneous frankness. They give glimpses of a home-life that was simple and sincere ; they show the great Reformer of Russia lamenting the fact that, in his absence from his beloved wife, he has no one to look after his linen, no one to see that his hair is combed, no one to talk to in his loneliness without " the friend of his heart." One sees him the big, restless, untidy man for the coronation of Catherine patiently submitting to her wish—discarding his old green suit, his thick woollen stockings and bullet-holed hat, and, laughing perhaps at his own foolishness, putting on the gorgeous blue and

silver Court dress she had made for him with her own hands.

When he first saw her she was only just a Livonian peasant girl, an orphan, who had been adopted by a clergyman, married to a Swedish soldier, who, luckily for her, disappeared the day of the wedding, and finally had been protected first by General Cheremetyeff, then by Menshikoff. To Peter at that time all women were much alike, and the fact that she was Menshikoff's mistress in no way affected him. She pleased him, and that was sufficient and perfectly excused his taking her away from the favourite.

But Catherine was to be more than just a passing attraction in his life, and her power over him grew in a way that was almost amazing. In the accesses of nervous prostration, and intolerable headaches to which he was occasionally subject, and which caused all his friends to fly from his fury, she alone retained the ability to calm him, nursing that savage, throbbing head against her breast, speaking to him softly and soothingly as a mother to a child. Though after his death she herself led a life of excess, she recognised the danger of his over-indulgence, and, whenever it was possible, attempted to stop his intemperate drinking, even going to the door behind which he had shut himself to celebrate with a few boon companions the launching of a new ship. "It is time to go home, Little Father," she cried, and obediently the Ruler of Russia rose from table and followed her.

Above all things she was his companion, his comrade, and his friend; she went with him on all his campaigns; her courage was supreme and unrivalled; a true soldier's wife she feared neither danger nor discomforts, and would sleep in a rough tent and ride all day without showing signs of fatigue.

The stories of her giving up her diamonds, of her bargaining with the Turks, and of her ready wit and tact which saved the Russian Army when it was surrounded on the banks of the Pruth are well known—though perhaps slightly exaggerated ; but it was in memory of her assistance to him there that Peter instituted the Order of St. Catherine, and it was shortly after the campaign of the Pruth that he married her publicly in the Chapel adjoining Menshikoff's Palace.

After the death of their son in 1719, Peter decided on a step that was almost unprecedented in the history of Russia, and in 1724, Catherine, a Livonian peasant girl, a camp-follower and a servant, was crowned Empress of Russia—the special diadem of pearls and diamonds that was made for her costing a million and a half roubles. In the golden dusk of the old Cathedral she knelt before the man who had raised her to such incredible heights and, overcome with emotion, wept as she bent to kiss his hand ; and yet it was she, the woman to whom he had given his love and trust and the highest honour in the land, who, six months later, struck a blow at his heart from which he was never to recover.

Knowing Peter as she must have done, one wonders at her temerity in betraying him, marvels at the foolishness that led her to believe that her intrigue with William Mons, a Chamberlain of the Court, would remain undiscovered. But, even when her lover was arrested, tried on a false charge of treason, condemned and executed, her courage never faltered, nor could Peter, forcing her to drive with him past the scaffold where the body was still hanging, wring a word of protest or complaint from her.

Perhaps it was a secret admiration of this fortitude of hers that induced him to spare her when, in his first insane, frenzied rage, he had contemplated having her publicly disgraced and executed. Morose and silent, fatally ill

already and tortured by incessant pain, he held his hand while a gloom that was ominous and sinister pervaded the Court, and the grim northern winter settled slowly down over the new capital. In January, however, there was a patched-up reconciliation, and Catherine was pardoned by the man who loved her but who could never forget; who, when she knelt to ask his forgiveness raised her from her knees, but went his way unsmiling, a savage pain in his heart, a sullen despair on his ravaged face. A few weeks later, refusing to listen to the doctors' advice, he set out for Ladoga to supervise the works on the canal, and, seeing a boat with some soldiers in it wrecked near the shore, plunged into the lake to their rescue, bringing them to land by almost super-human strength.

By many people Catherine was accused of having hastened Peter's end with the aid of Menshikoff, but the violent fever brought on by his immersion in the icy water was enough to prove fatal to a man in the Emperor's condition, and, returning to Petersburg, he died after a short illness on the 28th of January, leaving behind him no will or testament that bequeathed the mighty work of regeneration to a successor, the last feeble words scrawled in his failing hand breaking off with " Give everything to—— " leaving the sentence for ever unfinished and the name of his successor for ever unknown.

Immense, incredible, gigantic, his shadow towers in the history of Russia, a turbulent force that swept good and evil before it, that laughed at defeat and seemed to pass with callous indifference over tragedy. Raising Russia out of the darkness of ignorance, liberating women from the slavery of the Terem, building cities, planting forests, constructing canals, fighting Swedes and Turks and Persians, learning ship-building in Holland and in England, visiting the King

of France in Paris, the Emperor of Austria in Vienna, overcoming enemies abroad and at home, subjugating the will of the people, planting a seed of progress that, in spite of disorders and confusion, was to take root and flourish.

The long summer evenings of Northern Russia seem always full of ghosts, spirits that steal down the twilight paths, dreams that gather round the sleeping trees, grey shadows of dead loves and hope and laughter that the darkness of night-time covers, but that stretch-out beckoning hands in the strange, dim light that is neither dusk nor dawn. So, that evening at Peterhof, when at last we boarded our little steamer and the silver murmur of the hidden fountains in the park came to us softly across the water, I seemed to see on the terrace of Mon Plaisir a giant figure standing with folded arms and fierce, wild, sombre eyes looking out across the sea. Slowly, as we steamed away, the churches and houses he had dreamt of rose out of the hyacinth-coloured mist, and when we crept silently up the river; past the great palaces along the quays, the fire of the long-dead sunset still gleamed on the golden spires and the great dome of the Isaac Cathedral, even as the deeds of the long-dead Emperor still burn in fire and gold in the pages of history.

CHAPTER V

CATHERINE—GRAND DUCHESS !

IN the month of January of the year 1744 there arrived in Russia a little girl who had been given before she left Germany many injunctions and much good advice from a rigid Protestant father, and whose sole wealth consisted of four silk dresses, a length of blue and silver stuff, and a Lutheran Prayer Book. She had with her, too, a tiresome, petulant, intriguing mother who very often slapped and scolded her, who complained and groaned and cast up her eyes at the bad roads, the uncomfortable inns, the lack of decent accommodation and food, and who became still more aggravating in her puffed-out pride when the travellers were received with great ceremony and honours at Riga and Petersburg.

The little girl, however, was used to her mother's crossness, and also to her petulance and her vanity, and, looking at the snow-bound wastes, the endless forests of pine and birch, the frozen rivers, her thoughts were already busy with other things: her mind, that was no longer so very childish, was made up to conquer the heart of this great strange country, and make herself beloved and worshipped by its people.

After a rest in Petersburg, the journey to Moscow, where the Empress Elisabeth was then in residence, was performed in pomp and luxury that greatly pleased the little girl's mother. The enormous sledge painted in scarlet and silver,

with its costly furs, its cushions, and mattresses, and silken coverlets lined with wool, delighted her with its comfort, while the guard of honour and suite who accompanied them gave her an almost childish pleasure. One can see her, the poor, blundering, unwise woman, rather red about the face, rather watery about the eyes, lying in that gorgeous sledge, muffled in furs, thinking her foolish, injudicious thoughts.

Had she not been asked to bring her daughter Sophie, familiarly known as "Figchen," to marry the Heir to this great Empire? And had not she herself, the Princess Jeanne of Anhalt Zerbst, been entrusted by Frederick of Prussia with a secret mission, namely, that of working with the Marquis de la Chetardie, the French Ambassador, against the powerful Chancellor Besthouzhew? The Princess Jeanne could not get over the greatness of her own importance, and the ceremony attending their arrival at Moscow and the gracious reception of the Empress still further swelled out her vanity, making her for the time being insufferably consequential and arrogant.

Her daughter, her mind still engrossed with her one fixed intention, took it all more quietly, looking with her big bright eyes at the ugly, awkward, gawky boy, whom she remembered having once seen at Eutin when he was eleven years old, and whom she had on that first occasion instantaneously disliked and despised. But he was now no longer just Prince Peter Ulric of Schleswig Holstein, he was the Grand Duke Peter, hereditary Heir to the Throne of Russia, and she had been brought all the way from Germany to marry him! If she showed her distaste, her contempt and repugnance, she might be sent back in disgrace, and then she would never be Empress of Russia.

So the starry eyes looked at him gravely, weighing and

considering his crookedness, his sallowness, his general unlovely awkwardness, while the fresh, soft colour deepened a little on the smooth cheeks, at having perforce to listen to his foolish confidences, for almost the first thing he told her was his consuming passion for a Mademoiselle Laphoukin who had just been exiled with her aunt to Siberia, and the Princess Sophie, who had been well brought up, thanked him prettily for his trust in her, but kept her secret thoughts to herself.

But very nearly Fate decreed that the name of a clever woman and a great Empress should never be known to history, for scarcely ten days after her arrival in Moscow the little girl, unaccustomed to the Russian climate, contracted a severe chill by walking up and down her room all night in a dogged determination to master the beginnings of the Russian language, and lay dying of pleurisy in the Kremlin. Summoned back from the Troitski Monastery, where she had just gone on one of her frequent pilgrimages, the Empress arrived at last, chased away the foolish, hysterical mother, and insisted on the patient being bled ; a treatment that had to be repeated sixteen times in twenty-seven days, but which ultimately saved the child's life.

At last, on the 28th of June (old style), the Princess Sophie of Anhalt Zerbst, still rather pale, and very slender in a red dress trimmed with silver, was received into the Orthodox Church under the name of Catherine Alexeievna, and the next day was publicly betrothed to the Grand Duke Peter in the glorious old Uspensky Cathedral.

Her determined ambition to be Empress of Russia seemed on the way to be realised, but twice again she was very nearly cheated of her heritage : once when the Empress discovered Princess Jeanne's intrigues against Besthouzhew, and threatened to send both her and her daughter back to

Germany ; and again when Peter, barely recovered from the measles, suddenly developed smallpox on his way from Moscow to Petersburg, and had to be left at Hatilof; Elisabeth, who had already gone on to the capital, hurriedly returning to nurse him.

Catherine and her mother continued the journey to Petersburg alone, and, arrived there, took up their quarters in the Winter Palace, the grey days dragging themselves away in lugubrious and intolerable boredom. The Princess Jeanne, still smarting from the Empress's severe reprimand, was petulant and dissatisfied, complained that her daughter had better apartments than she had, and made herself generally as insupportable as a foolish, gossiping, peevish old lady could well do.

Catherine filled the long empty hours with reading history and philosophy and with unremitting study of the Russian language, and, perhaps, looking out across the frozen Neva, walking or driving down the wide, unfinished, untidy streets she dreamt of the palaces she was to build one day when the world would acclaim her as Star of the North. It was not to be too easy though, the path for her young feet, her ardent imagination and temperament, her passionate love of beauty ; for at the beginning of January of the year 1745 the Empress Elisabeth returned to Petersburg, bringing with her the Heir to the Throne, only barely recovered from his attack of smallpox.

Castera pretends that, after her first meeting with Peter, Catherine, on returning to her room, fell into a dead faint which lasted for three hours ; and, in her Memoirs, she herself acknowledges that she was " nearly frightened " by Peter's changed appearance, that " his features had become coarsened and thick, that his face was still swollen, while an enormous wig he wore to hide his baldness still further

added to his grotesque appearance." The picture is hardly a pretty one, but the Crown of Russia—was that not worth a sacrifice? It was surely the luminous shadow of that crown she saw always above the grey mists of the frozen river, while the fire of its jewels burnt before her when, alone in her room, she thought of Peter, and shuddered a little, closing her eyes against the vision of his sallow, pock-marked face.

His treatment of her also bitterly wounded her pride, for he neglected her publicly, treated her always with careless indifference, and, when, in May, Elisabeth moved into the Summer Palace, and Catherine and her mother were given apartments in a house adjoining on the Fontanka, he sent her a message to say that, as she now lived so far away, it would not be possible for him to come and see her every day. Her self-esteem suffered from his evident lack of affection for her, but, if she cried secretly, she showed no signs of her grief in public, but went on her way determined always to win the affection, the respect and admiration of all with whom she came in contact, making it a rule to believe that everybody she met was necessary to her in some way, or would be of use to her in the future.

Soon after their removal to the Summer Palace, the Court again changed its abode and went to Peterhof, and here, by the blue Gulf of Finland, in the shady park with its many whispering fountains, the time passed quickly, and in the company of her ladies-in-waiting, who were young and gay and full of spirits, Catherine tried to forget what lay before her, though as the day fixed for the wedding approached, she became more and more melancholy—her indomitable, resolute ambition alone sustaining her.

At last, on August 21st, the marriage was celebrated in Petersburg with all the pomp of magnificent ceremony that was habitual to the Court of Russia, and a month later the

Princess Jeanne of Anhalt-Zerbst said good-bye to her daughter and returned to Germany. Tiresome she had been, foolish and petulant and domineering, but yet Catherine wept to see her go, feeling herself now really alone and defenceless, her depression not in any way lightened by the removal from her service of her favourite lady-in-waiting, Mademoiselle Choukoff.

That winter passed in an endless series of balls and masquerades which the Empress adored. Elisabeth was at this time at the height of her mature, voluptuous beauty, and, though already beginning to get too stout, she still retained a splendid figure, her head with the beautiful neck and shoulders was superbly held, her eyes were so dark a blue as almost to be black, her hair was abundant and softly fair; and yet, for all her loveliness, this daughter of Peter the Great had inherited a great deal of her father's harshness, his pitiless inflexible cruelty and relentlessness. Before her accession to the Throne she had sworn, kneeling before a silver crucifix, to abolish the death penalty; but this did not prevent her sometimes punishing those who crossed her path with almost inhuman brutality. Hundreds were tortured and beaten; hundreds more were exiled to Siberia and never heard of again.

The most glaring of all her acts of intolerance was her punishment of the beautiful Madame Laphoukin, who had dared at a ball in the Palace to appear in a pink dress, which was the Empress's favourite colour, and which nobody else at Court ever ventured to wear. Whatever fancied crimes of conspiracy and intrigue were later imputed to Madame Laphoukin, the crime of being more beautiful than the Empress was still the greatest, and for this she had her tongue cut out, was sentenced to twenty strokes of the knout, and exiled to Siberia.

Against this woman, ruthless when her anger was aroused, vain, luxury-loving, indolent, intensely superstitious, at times drinking to excess, or else fanatically religious, and always absolutely immoral, Catherine, young and inexperienced, was pitted ; and more and more Peter made it evident to her that she meant nothing to him, and that, if ever she was in trouble, he would not stand by her. Flagrantly unfaithful to her, he passed most of his days in smoking, drinking, playing the violin atrociously badly, or else amusing himself with his marionette theatre, his tin soldiers and toy fortresses ; his passion for military parades making him dress up his unfortunate chamberlains and servants in uniforms, and drill them for hours on end in his bedroom.

In every way he was unpleasant, coarse-minded, and dirty in his habits to such an extent that, when the Empress ordered him to have a bath, he refused on the ground of his health ; his wife saying of him with a certain plaintive maliciousness : " His Imperial Highness was insupportable in summer."

Although she found her chief consolation in books, the life Catherine was forced to lead often wearied her with its irksome repression and constraint. Watched on all sides, not allowed to go out without permission, she was kept almost a prisoner, with a husband she could not trust, who shamelessly neglected her, from whose presence she shrank even though her pride suffered at his indifference.

Only when they were in residence at Oranienbaum, the estate the Empress had given the Grand Duke near Peterhof, was Catherine a little more free. The early mornings, with the rising sun on the blue waters and the dew on the grass, saw her, fresh and fair, in man's attire, a gun on her shoulder, accompanied by one old servant, going off to shoot ducks in the reedy marshes. Or else, riding astride, she

would gallop through the pine woods round Peterhof, the soft air bringing a flush of colour to her cheeks, a sparkle of joyous laughter to her wonderful eyes. She forgot during those moments the constant pit-falls and dangers that beset her path ; she forgot the crooked, foul-minded boy who was her husband, and the stern, tiresome Madame Tchoglokoff, who had been made Grand Mistress of her Court and whose spying watchfulness and prim virtue was a trying burden to bear.

From Petersburg to Moscow and back again, from Peterhof and Oranienbaum to the new Palace at Tsarskoe, just under construction, the Court journeyed, with occasional visits to Gostilitza, the country estate of Count Razumovsky, Elisabeth's chief favourite. With endless packings, endless trails of servants, of sledges and carriages, of boxes, cases, furniture and provisions, these constant removals were made ; and during the long absences, Petersburg, deserted and almost empty, seemed to become a silent city of the dead.

Then at last the Court returned ; the windows of the palaces were cleaned of cobwebs and dust ; the streets, overgrown with grass and weeds, were full once more of painted coaches, carriages and sledges, while the golden peal of a hundred bells rang out from the brightly-domed churches. There were picnics out on the ice-hills, shooting parties on the islands ; concerts, receptions and balls at the Winter Palace ; masquerades where, sometimes, by the command of the Empress, women had to dress as men, and men as women—a disguise that, becoming to a very few, was hopelessly unflattering to the company in general : fat old ladies with short legs trying in vain to look unconscious and at ease, while Court Chamberlains with yellow, scraggy necks tried to hide their shortcomings with jewels or a scarf of lace.

Elisabeth's love of dress and adornment had given rise to endless extravagance—the Courtiers competing and trying to outshine each other in the elaborate splendour of their attire. At one ball, Catherine, in despair of being able to have a new costume richer than any of the other ladies, appeared in the simplest of white dresses, a pink rose-bud tucked in the front of her dress, and another half hidden in the masses of her luxuriant hair. Her dazzling youth and freshness, her vivacity and vitality, charmed all beholders, and many a Courtier's heart beat a little faster when the magnetic eyes, whose colour no chronicler seems to be certain of, smiled into his.

But one heart remained apparently unresponsive and entirely insensible to her charm, for the Grand Duke continued to treat her with the utmost unconcern, never even attempting to hide his many infidelities from her, indeed, boasting to her of his conquests, or else making her his *confidante* when his advances were repulsed. And presently the girl, whose love stories were to be famous all over Europe, stretched out eager hands to the first faint warmth of that fire that later on was to light her life with such consuming heat.

Her husband had inspired her with nothing but distaste, the affection she might at first have given him had been thrown back on itself by his abominable behaviour. Zachar Tchernichoff, who had made ardent love to her, seemingly gained nothing but an exchange of letters and verses ; Count Tchogloloff, fat and sly and foolish, had only disgusted her by his heavy attempts at paying court ; but Serge Soltikoff, twenty-six years old, audacious, gay, a practised and finished love-maker, was a very different matter.

During a hunt on Tchogloloff's estate on one of the

islands near Petersburg, he managed to get separated from the rest of the suite with Catherine, riding close to her under the dripping trees, while the sound of the hunt died away in the distance. When at last he put spurs to his horse and galloped away, she was seized by a sudden terror. "No—no—no," she called after him, and, laughingly above the thud of his horse's hoofs, his answer came back to her: "Yes—yes—yes——"

And yet this love story of Catherine's was hardly a very happy one, for Serge Soltikoff, with all his charm, was stupid, fickle and changeable, and already that summer, when he returned from the country where he had gone on account of the gossip that was linking his name with that of the Grand Duchess, he seemed to her less ardent and attentive; indeed, she once called him "*Fat—arrogant et dissipé.*"

After a short stay at Peterhof and Oranienbaum the Court moved to Moscow, and here again Soltikoff showed his diminished affection, excusing himself on the plea that he affected a coolness in his manner so as to hoodwink the over-curious Courtiers. Knowing that he lied to her, Catherine pretended ignorance, showing herself calm and collected before the world, laughing gaily at the jokes and antics of Léon Narishkin, that "born Harlequin" who was to be such a true friend to her all through her life.

It was during this visit to Moscow that Madame Tchoglo-koff, drawing Catherine aside one day, read her the lecture that has since been so much discussed, telling her that, as after nine years she had had no child from the Grand Duke, she, Madame Tchoglo-koff, would put no obstacle in her way if she chose to show any preference for either Soltikoff or Narishkin; that special circumstances excused many things, and that it was necessary for the good of the country that an heir should be born to the Throne. To all of which

Catherine listened with such a well-acted air of pretended innocence and ignorance, that Madame Tchoglokoff finally threw up her hands in despair and scolded her impatiently for being a dunce.

In the early autumn of that year, the big wooden Palace at Moscow was totally destroyed by fire in the space of three hours, and the Empress and all the Court had to seek accommodation in different parts of the city. Under all her riches and splendour Russia was still uncivilised in many ways ; and Catherine, lodged first in Tchoglokoff's house, and then in the Bishop's Palace, was overjoyed, after the incredible, sordid discomfort of these two habitations, to receive permission from the Empress to go to Liberitza, the estate Peter had just been given not far from Moscow.

Meanwhile the Palace in the Kremlin was hastily rebuilt, and, for the feasts of the New Year, the Court was once more able to take up its abode there—balls and entertainments of all kinds succeeding each other without end. But Catherine was now expecting a child and was unable to take part in many of the ceremonies, and, solitary and neglected, was overwhelmed with a deep melancholy, seeing more clearly that Soltikoff was no longer faithful to her, and yet, woman-like, dreading every moment to hear that he was to be removed from Court. To add to the difficulties of her position Tchoglokoff died, just when she had succeeded in completely winning him over to her side, and Alexander Shouvaloff, who replaced him, was hated and feared by everybody, so that Catherine found herself watched and spied on even more closely than before.

The journey from Moscow to Petersburg was a torture of discomfort and endless boredom ; the rooms assigned to her in the Summer Palace were dark and gloomy ; even the birth of her son brought her no joy, for the Empress took

him away into her own apartments at once, and Catherine was left, exhausted and suffering, with no one to attend to her, while hardly anyone came near her during the days and weeks that followed ; and her misery was deepened by Serge Soltikoff being sent on a mission to Sweden, while, at the same time, Princess Gagarine, her favourite lady-in-waiting, left her service and got married. When she was still convalescent the Court moved into the Winter Palace, and here, her bedroom being uninhabitable owing to its proximity to Peter's apartments, with the acrid smell of his tobacco and the incessant noise of his shouting and drilling, Catherine slept on a sofa in an ante-room which, though small, was at least quiet and warm.

Nobody worried about her, and she seemed suddenly to have become a person of very little importance. The necessary Heir to the Throne had been produced and was now the Empress's sole interest, and meanwhile the mother counted for nothing. Even the mystery that surrounded the birth of the child was for the moment immaterial. Russia and Europe might raise questioning eyebrows, ask in cynical curiosity : " Whose son is the Tsarevitch ? Zachar Tchernichoff's ? Léon Narishkin's ? Serge Soltikoff's ? " Nobody troubled to find the answer. Virtually, of course, Peter was the father, but—Russia and Europe shrugged expressive shoulders. Later, when he grew up, Paul was to show such marked resemblance to his official father that the problem of his parentage became once more a vexed and unanswerable question, surrounded by a cloud of scandals, intrigues and mysteries ; it was even at one moment whispered that the child was not Catherine's at all, but Elisabeth's, whom she had placed in its stead.

Catherine herself, plunging into her studies, trying to forget Soltikoff's infidelities and her husband's hopeless,



A VILLAGE NEAR YALTA.



CHERRY ORCHARDS NEAR BAKHCHI SERAI.



uncouth coarseness, isolated herself almost completely from the Court on the plea of ill-health, and during the long, lonely days—reading, thinking, and preparing herself for the future—seemed to be forming herself into the Empress, who, though of foreign blood, was to be a worthy successor to Peter the Great. The little girl with the fresh complexion and the shining eyes was gone now for ever, and in her place was a woman. A woman who faced her enemies with a proud disdain, at the same time outwitting them with gay, malicious laughter ; a woman who watched and waited and laid her plans with slow and careful purpose.

At last Serge Soltikoff arrived in Petersburg ; but Catherine's joy at his return was dimmed, for, at the first meeting arranged with her, he failed to appear, keeping her waiting in an agony of suspense till three o'clock in the morning, and merely sending an excuse the next day to say that he had been inveigled into a Free Mason's Lodge and had not been able to get away. Finally, however, he came to see her a few days later, persuaded her, all too easily, to forgive him, and induced her even to come out of her retirement and take her place at Court.

So, in a splendid dress of blue velvet embroidered with gold, she made her official appearance once more, causing Count Shouvaloff many moments of acute discomfort and annoyance by her arrogance and haughtiness, laughing at him all the time behind his back, and imitating his continual grimaces to the amusement of all the Court. Shouvaloff's complaints being brought to Peter's hearing, he went in a furious passion to his wife and accused her of being insufferably proud. Catherine gently asked him in what this excessive pride consisted ; to which he could only answer that she held herself too straight ; and when she burst out laughing, lost all control, and threatened to draw his sword.

During the spring, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams came as English Ambassador to Petersburg, bringing in his train Stanislas Poniatowsky, the man who was to inspire Catherine with a romantic tenderness that not all her subsequent infidelities could quite efface. In spite of her many lovers, in spite of her later treatment of his country when he was King of Poland, she seemed never quite to forget the first real passion that had come to her when she had deemed herself deserted and unhappy. The young Pole, with his slender, graceful figure, his pale face and soft luminous eyes, his manners of Paris and London, quickly consoled her for the absence of Serge Soltikoff, whose flirtations in Sweden and Dresden were constantly being brought to her ears.

It was Léon Narishkin again who acted as go-between in the romance, sending the Grand Duchess letters which, though supposed to come from him, she easily saw were written by a different hand ; and when in the autumn the Court returned to Petersburg, and were installed in the newly-reconstructed Winter Palace, Léon's gay audaciousness completely overcame Catherine's habitual caution. The apartments that had been given her were somewhat removed from those of the Grand Duke, and Léon persuaded her one night to pretend to retire to bed early, dismiss Madame Vladislava, and then get up again, put on a man's dress, and wait for him to come and mew at her door like a cat and lead her to his sister-in-law's house, where Poniatowsky was waiting for her. So was the first secret meeting arranged, to be succeeded by many others ; return visits to Catherine's rooms also being engineered with elaborate precautions—the risk and danger that attended these gatherings only adding to their enjoyment.

Those evenings when, slim and slender in her man's attire, she slipped past the sentries at the Palace gates,

Catherine was only a girl going to meet her lover ; but the shadows were gathering round her path ; and at other moments she was a woman who faced decisions of tremendous importance, who waited and calculated, watched every trick of the complicated game, and wisely chose the moment to make a move.

The great Chancellor Besthouzhew, who had formerly been her implacable enemy, was now entirely won over to her side ; and when Poniatowski was forced to leave Petersburg, it was through his help that she succeeded in getting him recalled as Polish Minister to Russia. More and more her influence began to be felt in politics, and more and more foreign diplomats began to foresee that she was a power to be reckoned with.

But her approaching confinement, which her husband, in a fit of temper, declared had nothing to do with him ; the failing health of the Empress, who had become subject to prolonged fainting fits ; and Peter's renewed and violent passion for Elisabeth Worontzoff—all warned Catherine that the moment for a definite choice had come. Either she must share Peter's life and whatever fate had in store for him, or she must be exposed to his pleasure ; or, on the other hand, she must take a path entirely independent of him. In fact, she must either perish with him, or by him, or try and save herself, her children, and the State from the danger with which he threatened them. Deciding on the latter course, she determined to advise him whenever it was possible, to try not to rouse his anger, and all the time to work for the favour of the public and show the people that in her they had a refuge.

When Catherine's daughter Anne was born, the Empress, as before, immediately removed the baby to her own apartments ; but this time Catherine had taken her precautions,

and was determined not to be left lonely and solitary during her convalescence. Accordingly, on the pretext of protecting herself from draughts, she had huge screens placed at one side of her bed so arranged as to cut off one part of the room. In this cunningly-constructed alcove she could receive visitors, and, if anybody came in, could pull the curtains of her bed and hide it from sight.

Poniatowsky, disguised in a fair wig, and declaring himself, when challenged, to be one of the Grand Duke's musicians, was naturally a frequent visitor ; Léon Narishkin and his sister-in-law, and one or two others were admitted, and one evening were nearly discovered by Count Shouvaloff, who asked to be received in order to show Catherine the plans for some projected fireworks. Madame Vladislava, who suspected Catherine's ruse, knocked at the door, thus allowing time for the curtains to be pulled, hiding the alcove and the guests. Catherine, rubbing her eyes as if just awakened from sleep, received Shouvaloff, discussed the matter with him at length, and finally, when he had gone, rang for an enormous supper to be brought, declaring that she was dying of hunger—indeed, one wonders what the servants must have thought of her tremendous appetite at this time !

In February, 1758, Besthouzhew was arrested, implicated, it was supposed, with the Grand Duchess, in the buying over of General Appraxine, who, after his victory over the Prussians at Gross Jägersdorf, had suddenly and incomprehensibly retired. Catherine knew herself to be innocent of this treason, but there were other things she and Besthouzhew had discussed which might be seized on by her enemies. The health of the Empress was causing ever greater anxiety, the future of the Crown was precarious, and the great Chancellor had written several times to the Grand Duchess,

proposing that, on the death of the Empress, she should be given equal rights of sovereignty with Peter. With her habitual prudence she had merely sent back an answer by word of mouth, declaring the project to be too dangerous and difficult. Besthouzhew, however, had persevered, writing and rewriting the proposal, the drafts of which he luckily had time to burn before his arrest.

Some incriminating letters from Poniatowsky were, however, found; the Empress asked for his immediate recall; and Catherine, fearing what further discoveries might be made, burnt all her papers, and wrote a letter to the Empress, in which, forestalling her probable disgrace, she begged to be allowed to go home. She had failed, she said, in winning the affection of the Grand Duke; as she was never allowed to see her children it made no difference whether she was in the same country or not; she was sure, too, that the Empress would care for them and that they would not miss her. She begged, therefore, to be given permission to go away, as the state of her health had become impaired by her mental suffering.

The letter sent off, Catherine waited in suspense for an answer which failed to appear; and meanwhile still another blow was struck at her, for, by order of the Empress, Madame Vladislava, who had been in her service for years, was removed from Court. Believing everything to be lost, and overcome with grief, Catherine gave way to a hopeless fit of tears, till one of the ladies-in-waiting suggesting the idea to her, she declared herself to be dying, and asked in a gasping whisper to see a priest.

Her confessor was immediately brought, and, knowing that every word would at once be repeated to the Empress, she told him the whole story: how Peter was so enamoured with Elisabeth Worontzoff that he had not even come to

enquire for her when he heard that she was dangerously ill ; how everybody suspected her of intriguing ; and how her letter to the Empress had never been answered. So successful was she, and so uneasy was Elisabeth at the account given by the confessor of Catherine's state of mind, that the next evening the long-desired interview was at last accorded.

Outside, on the wide stone quays the bitter wind blew the snow in drifting mists down the frozen river ; within, in the warm shadowy room, the interview that was to decide, not only Catherine's fate, but the fate of a whole Empire dragged slowly on. The flickering light of the candles fell on the Empress, her radiant beauty a ruin, the hand of death which she dreaded so intensely already touching her shoulder, and on the woman whose youth was still a triumphant challenge, whose eyes were so magnificent in their anger, whose proud head was bent in pretended humility, whilst her ridiculous husband, reeking of drink and tobacco, balanced himself on rickety legs, trying to throw aspersions on her, trying to argue with her, blundering, losing his temper, beaten at every turn by her quick wit, her unfailing ready answers.

The daughter of Peter the Great looked at the mean, miserable specimen of humanity who was Heir to the Throne of Russia, and sighed with a sudden, overwhelming weariness. It was true that he was her sister's son, and therefore the grandson of the Emperor, but there was nothing to make it seem possible ; and she sighed again and looked across at the girl who was his wife, finding in her some of the unconquered spirit of that dead, magnificent father of hers. If she sent Catherine back to Germany in disgrace, Peter would most certainly marry the squinting, spitting, pock-marked Elisabeth Worontzoff.

The Empress stirred restlessly in her chair. In the big

golden mirror on the marble-topped table it seemed to her that her father's strange, wild eyes appealed to her, and, rising suddenly, she drew near to Catherine and gave her her hand in dismissal, whispering to her at the same time that she still had much to say to her, but that she could not speak openly at present on account of those that were present. A few hours later she sent the Vice-Chancellor, Worontzoff, to her with a message begging her to renounce her idea of leaving Russia ; and shortly before the Court left for the country, Catherine received permission to go and visit her children—the Empress coming into the room while she was there.

The memoirs of Catherine end abruptly in the middle of her description of this second interview, and if there were any further notes written by her, they were all burnt by Paul when, on her death, he went through her papers. It is certain, however, that the victory of the young Grand Duchess was complete, and her position with the Empress assured beyond any discrediting rumours.

But in spite of her triumph, the following year was not to be a very happy one. Poniatowsky, evading and postponing the moment of departure for as long as possible, had at last to leave. In April her little daughter Anne died, and a few months later she received the news of her mother's death in Paris. But Catherine had courage and resilience, and, luckily for her, she was not faithful for very long. Although the memory of Poniatowsky's gallantry, his quick poetic turn of a phrase, and his eyes that seemed able to express so many things, were never quite forgotten, yet her curiosity and interest were soon aroused by a man who was as great a contrast as it is possible to imagine.

Brave as a lion, stupid as an owl, absolutely uneducated, and yet possessing that unexplainable gift of fascination and

attraction, Gregory Orloff was a giant in stature, with honey-coloured hair, laughing, audacious eyes, and a beautiful profile. He and his four brothers were supposed to be descended from that soldier of the Strelitsii Guard who was named by his comrades Orel (the Eagle), and who, according to the legend, on his way to execution, during the wholesale extermination of the Strelitsii, disdainfully pushed aside the bleeding head of the man who had preceded him on the scaffold, an action seen by Peter the Great, who, attracted by the man's magnificent figure and calm, unwavering courage, pardoned and released him on the spot.

The absolute mastery Gregory Orloff quickly won over Catherine seems hard to explain, but she was wise enough to know that in the future she would need men who were fearless, and who would without question risk death for her sake, and, by binding Gregory to her side, she won the support of his brothers, who were perhaps the only men in Russia at that moment who answered to her purpose.

At the same time she succeeded in gaining the support of Panin, who had been made governor of her son, and whose cold, careful, calculating brain was necessary to her, with the Orloff brothers—all ardour and impetuous fire and flame. Scandal has since affirmed that to win Panin's adherence, Princess Dashkow, who, though she was the sister of Elisabeth Worontzoff, was entirely devoted to Catherine's cause, sacrificed her antipathy to him and became his mistress ; but in the midst of the web of intrigue and conspiracy that surrounded the Winter Palace it is difficult to know the truth, and Princess Dashkow was apt to always exaggerate her own part in the *coup d'état* which placed Catherine on the Throne.

And as the days passed on the Court saw ever more clearly that the Empress could not live much longer, and

the question of succession became ever more vital—was discussed in whispers in the corridors of the Palace, in gilded, diplomatic drawing-rooms, in shadowed doorways, at the corners of the streets. Peter, with his furtive pock-marked face and his Holstein soldiers, was hated and despised by everybody. It was certain that, once Emperor, he would divorce Catherine, marry Elisabeth Worontzoff, make peace with Prussia, govern—how would the little drunken dissolute man govern Russia? Hands were flung up in despair, and heads shaken in grave and melancholy foreboding. There remained the alternatives of giving Catherine equal rights with him, or of granting his crown to the little eight-year-old Paul, and making his mother Regent during his minority.

Panin favoured this latter plan, but the Orloffs had other ideas, and Catherine watched and waited, the dream of the little girl who had come to Russia eighteen years ago with the one determined intention to be Empress, still unswerving and steadfast in her mind.

CHAPTER VI

CATHERINE—EMPRESS!

ON the 5th of January (o.s.) of the year 1762, the Empress Elisabeth died at Petersburg. Morbidly afraid of death and unable even to face its possibility, she could not make up her mind to change her will, or the line of succession; and so, inevitably, Peter of Holstein, that most unworthy grandson of the Great Reformer, became, in his turn, Emperor of all the Russias.

As had been expected, his first act was to suspend all activities of the armies in Germany, already in April signing a Treaty of Peace with Frederick of Prussia, while his behaviour to Catherine became every day more abominable. He insulted her publicly, called her a fool in front of the assembled Court, had her lodged in the furthest end of the Winter Palace, threatened her with imprisonment and banishment, and kept Elisabeth Worontzoff always by his side.

Smiling, beautiful, apparently resigned, Catherine continued to attend all ceremonies, even though she was now expecting her confinement, a condition that she must at all costs hide from the Emperor. So, when her son was finally born, Chkourin, her faithful and devoted servant, set fire to his house in a suburb of the capital, Peter and all his suite, as was expected, setting off in haste to watch the conflagration. It was Chkourin, too, who took the baby, bringing it up as his nephew under the name of Alexis Bobrinsky.

On the 24th of June the Emperor went to Oranienbaum, taking Elisabeth Worontzoff and several other ladies with him, and a few days later Catherine received orders to go at once to Peterhof to await her husband's arrival. And so slowly the golden days passed by, the 9th of July approached, with the story of the Revolution that has been told so often in somewhat varying details, though the outstanding facts still remain the same.

Terrified by the arrest of Passik, who was one of their party, the conspirators saw that they must either strike at once, or run the risk of all being discovered. Nothing had been prepared or got ready, but, in the pale, grey dusk of the Northern summer's night, Alexis Orloff set out to drive to Peterhof. Entering Catherine's room at four in the morning, he found her still fast asleep, and, stamping up to her bed in his heavy military boots, a huge, uncouth figure in the faint luminous light, he announced brusquely: "It is time for you to get up. Everything is prepared to proclaim you Empress."

Sitting up, her glorious hair falling round her shoulders, she gazed at him a moment with startled, wide-open eyes. Now that the moment she had been waiting for so long had come, did she shrink back afraid? Or did her heart beat in proud and glad anticipation? The risk she was taking was immense, and failure would mean certain imprisonment, probably torture and death. Outside in the park the birds were waking, calling to each other, the gold of the rising sun lit up the soft blue-grey waters of the Gulf of Finland, the laughing murmur of the fountains came in through the wide open windows. But to all Catherine's hurried questions Alexis only answered with his usual curt brevity, "Passik is arrested. We must go at once." He would give her no further explanation, and, dressing hurriedly with fingers

that shook a little, she at last got into the coach he had brought with him, accompanied only by one of her women and the faithful Chkourin.

The sun had risen completely when, leaving the shadows of the park, they came out on the dusty road between the green fields all sweet with thyme. And here that characteristic of the Russian temperament that never reckons or thinks ahead very nearly cost Catherine the throne and her life as well ; for Alexis, in his desperate hurry, had never thought of ordering a fresh relay of horses for the return journey to Petersburg, and, exhausted by the furious speed at which they had been driven the thirty-seven versts (twenty-five miles), and having had hardly any rest, the poor, panting animals began to flag, and at last could go no further. Furious, and fuming with impatience, Alexis tried in vain to beat them on ; Catherine wrung her hands in despair, a lark soared up into the morning sky, and the future of an Empire hung trembling in the balance.

It was a peasant's cart driving slowly along the road, laden probably with vegetables or flour, that saved the situation. The fresh horses were requisitioned and hurriedly harnessed, and the peasant was left staring after the coach that hurtled away in a cloud of dust.

Five versts out of Petersburg Gregory Orloff, who had begun to get anxious at this long delay, met them in another coach, and with him they drove to the Ismaeloffsky Barracks, where crowds of half-dressed soldiers hurried out to acclaim Catherine. They had been told that Peter threatened her with death and that it was their duty to save her. She smiled on them very sweetly and gave them her hand to kiss. And, like big children, carried away by their own enthusiasm, they called her " Little Mother " and swore to die for her.

From the Ismaeloffsky they went in triumph to the Simeonoff Barracks, and of all the Guard Regiments only the Preobojinski, where Elisabeth Worontzoff's brother commanded a company, offered any resistance, a resistance even then only momentary and almost immediately overcome. Next came a solemn service in the Kazan Cathedral, and from there Catherine was conducted amidst a cheering multitude to the Winter Palace, where representatives of the Senate and the Synod, soldiers, courtiers and members of the Government came to acclaim her and swear fealty.

So, in the early sweetness of that summer morning, was the Princess Sophie of Anhalt Zerbst proclaimed sole Empress of Russia ; the *coup d'etat* had been carried on a wave of enthusiasm, by the irresponsible ardour of youth, the fire and valour and tumult of a great romance, and the vision of a little girl, looking out across the snowbound wastes of an unknown country, had been realised.

Later that day Peter, entirely ignorant of what was happening in the capital, decided to visit Catherine at Peterhof, and accordingly set out from Oranienbaum accompanied as usual by Elisabeth Worontzoff and several other ladies. Arriving at the Palace he found it empty was told that Catherine had gone, and while, fuming with impatient rage, he was still demanding to know her whereabouts, a labourer arrived, footsore and covered with dust, and gave the Emperor a letter from a follower in Petersburg which told him of the events of the morning.

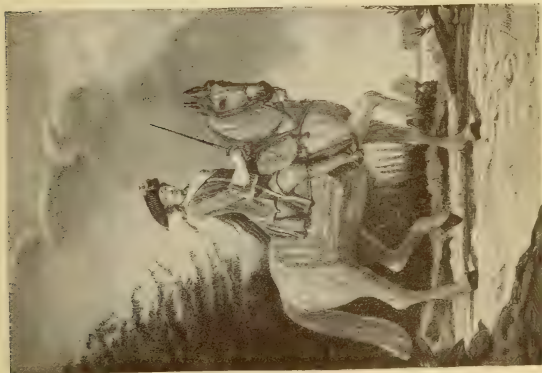
The little, sallow, pock-marked man let the crumpled letter fall from his trembling hands, terror mingling with his futile passion. Catherine ! All too well he knew what cause she had to hate him. He knew her energy, her pride, the unyielding hardness of which she was capable. When old Field Marshal Munich, whom Peter had called back from

his exile in Siberia, finally hurried out to Oranienbaum the deposed Emperor received him with tears of rage and helpless panic running down his cheeks. What was he to do? Catherine had escaped! The Guards had all gone over to her! She had usurped the Crown! His crown! When he caught her he would make her pay for this! She should never have another chance! But she was so clever, clever as a devil. There was no knowing what she would do next.

The grim old warrior must have looked even grimmer than usual as he listened to the disjointed raving of the man who called himself a grandson of Peter the Great, and tried in vain to instil a little energy and calmness into him. When, at last, the deposed Emperor decided to listen to the old soldier's advice and entrench himself in the Fortress of Kronstadt, it was too late, and an envoy from Catherine had got there ahead of them. So when, late that night, Peter's yacht approached the Island, and, challenged by sentries, answered that the Emperor was on board and wished to land, the quick retort was flung back across the water: "There is no Emperor. Put off, or we fire."

Terrified, Peter had hidden himself in the hold of the ship, surrounded by the weeping women he had brought with him. In vain Munich, hiding his contempt, urged him to make for Reval, and from there gain Pomerania and place himself at the head of his Holstein troops. The Emperor who was so little an Emperor could only tearfully insist on a speedy return to his beloved Palace at Oranienbaum, and in the dawning light of another day the yacht set back to the harbour from which she had come.

Arrived there, news was brought them that Catherine, at the head of all the Guards, was moving on Peterhof, and again Munich urged Peter to be firm, implored him to lead out his soldiers, to die if need be with a sword in his hand.



CATHERINE THE GREAT.



PETER THE GREAT.

But Peter's abject terror was now beyond all control, and in frenzied haste he sent one message after another to Catherine, imploring her mercy, her leniency ; promising everything and anything, abdicating at last in full. As Frederick of Prussia said of him with caustic sarcasm : "*Il s'est laissé détrôner comme un enfant que l'on envoie se coucher.*"

In the uniform of the Simeonoff Regiment, Catherine rode at the head of her troops up that same dusty road along which she had driven in frantic haste such a short time ago ; and, cheering and singing, the soldiers marched behind her, while, his golden head uncovered, Gregory Orloff rode proudly by her side. He had risked all for her sake, he had raised her from a position of dependance and constant danger to one of supreme and brilliant power, and they were young and they loved each other—so the world that summer's morning must have seemed very beautiful. And, without encountering any resistance from the Holstein soldiers, they arrived at last in triumph ; Peter was sent under the guard of Alexis Orloff and Tieploff to the castle of Ropscha, and Elisabeth Worontzoff, her short moment of power over, was despatched to Moscow.

The history of Russia abounds in mysteries that are wrapped in deepest secrecy, and the death of Catherine's miserable weakling of a husband is but another of those riddles that have never been solved. Alexis Orloff, Tieploff or Swanovitz—it seems certain that one of these three murdered the deposed Emperor. But which one really performed the deed ? And under whose orders was he acting ? Princess Dashkow in her memoirs asserts that on Catherine's death, Paul, going through her papers, found a letter from Alexis Orloff, accusing himself with abject remorse, of having killed Peter in a moment of drunken

fury. And yet, according to another account, it was Alexis who, galloping at topspeed from Ropscha, burst into Catherine's room at the Winter Palace to tell her that her husband was dead. One story relates that Swanovitz, at the order of Tieploff, strangled Peter, while still another account affirms that the deposed Emperor was given a glass of poisoned Burgundy to drink.

Certainly, by most people, his death was imputed to Catherine's agency, but Frederick of Prussia later on exonerated her categorically from any knowledge of the crime. "She learned of the fact with a despair that was not feigned," he asserts. "And she foresaw the judgment everybody holds against her till to-day."

So the body of the man whom nobody had loved, with the exception perhaps of Elisabeth Worontzoff and his pet monkey, was laid to rest; his wife wept a few tears that were real or feigned, wore mourning, and for a short time abstained from public functions. But in September already the bells of the Kremlin rang out in triumphant jubilation for the Coronation of the Empress, and the Emperor who had been deposed and murdered was seemingly forgotten.

It is a curious fact that nearly all the pictures of Catherine represent her as an elderly woman with a double chin, a high white forehead, rolled-back powdered hair, compelling, arresting eyes, and a certain somewhat malicious, subtle smile. One forgets, looking at these portraits, that the great Empress was ever young, and one inevitably thinks of her always as a rather stout old lady, with a commanding presence. But there is in the Weapon Room of the Treasury at Moscow a picture of her by Erikson which portrays her in military uniform, her masses of brown hair tied loosely back with a wide black ribbon, her slim figure in a soldier's dress sitting on her horse with proud and graceful ease,

her eyes, alight and vivid with a radiant joy of life, laughing out at one from the canvas, disdainful perhaps a little, holding in their depths secrets the world has never been able to read aright.

The Semiramis of the North ! Catherine the Great—or Catherine *le Grand* as Voltaire called her ! The woman who swept her husband out of her path and annexed the throne that by rights belonged to her son. The woman whose passions were a byword in Europe, who was never faithful, who, when she was sixty, had lovers of twenty. The Empress who annexed Poland, who conquered the Crimea, who sent out her armies against the Turks, the Persians and the Swedes ! It is a little difficult to find her in this picture, and yet this was the Catherine who rode out from Petersburg at the head of her troops, the Catherine who was crowned in the Kremlin, the Catherine who loved Gregory Orloff, and even at one time thought of marrying him.

It had often been whispered at Court that the Empress Elisabeth had secretly married her first favourite, Alexis Razumovsky ; but Gregory's unpopularity, caused by his arrogance and pride, the attempt to murder him, and the outbreak of disorders in the Guards Regiments caused the half formulated project to be hurriedly given up. And yet, in everything but name, he was practically Emperor of Russia, for his power and authority were supreme and his wealth almost fabulous. He had been made a Prince and Member of the Council, there was nothing he could not have achieved, had it not been for his incredible ignorance and indolence, which made him refuse to exert himself, save, when for the sake of an adventure, he shook himself up, and woke to sudden, imperious and startling energy. For nearly ten years his influence over the Empress was dominant, his position unassailable. Curt and rough and unfaithful

though he often was, she yet forgave him over and over again ; his huge figure, his golden hair, his beautiful face, still held their sway over her, the violence of his passions, his very indolence perhaps, making him only doubly dear to her.

But in those ten years Catherine was finding the Crown she had dreamt of somewhat cumbersome to wear, and her quickly won triumph not so easy to maintain. Orloff was unpopular and hated by the people ; now and then voices were raised demanding Paul as Emperor ; there were disorders, insurrections, conspiracies of all kinds, and in 1764 yet another grim tragedy was added to the many tragedies that make up the history of Russia.

On the accession of Elisabeth, the little Tsar Ivan had been separated from his family and imprisoned in the Fortress of Schlüsselberg on the Ladoga Lake, where he was kept in closest solitude. It was rumoured that once, in despair at Peter's total inadequacy, Elisabeth had Ivan brought up to Petersburg in order to try and make him heir to the throne. But, whether he was really half witted or the legend of his being so was cunningly maintained in order to alienate all public sympathy from him, it is difficult to say ; anyhow, without naming him her successor, Elisabeth sent him back to Schlüsselburg, where he was kept locked inside an iron cage in a cell, with two guards always near under strict orders to kill him at the slightest sound of a disturbance. If he was in truth an idiot, these excessive precautions seem unnecessary ; but the fact that he had once been Emperor was probaby enough to make him a constant danger to the party in power, and a figure of romance to the people, who were always ready to weave a legend round an imaginary character.

Be that as it may, with the ostensible cause of placing

Ivan on the throne, a young lieutenant named Mirovitch won over the garrison of the Fortress to the side of the Emperor whose whole life had been one long, dark shadow of imprisonment, leading them on to the door of the cell, and bursting it open only to find that the two guards on duty were all too ready to obey their instructions, and, with swords thrust through the bars of the cage, had already murdered the unfortunate Ivan. Mirovitch was promptly arrested, tried and executed, no words having passed his lips which gave any clue to the facts of the conspiracy. And by the express order of Catherine no further enquiries were made, though the rumour was circulated that it was she herself who had instigated the plot, so as to make the death of Ivan appear an accident.

Scarcely a year later the more serious revolt of the Cossack, Emilian Pougatcheff, broke out and swept over Russia. Calling himself Peter III. on the pretence that the deposed Emperor had escaped from prison before his murder, Pougatcheff won all the disorderly malcontents of the Empire to his cause—outlaws, peasants and deserting soldiers flocking in huge numbers to his banner. It was not only a conspiracy against Catherine, it was a Revolution against the State, a rising of the old Russia, Eastern, barbaric, uncivilised, that, cowed under the reforming rule of Western laws, slept, but never died. Finally, however, after a prolonged struggle, the Cossack leader was defeated, captured, brought to Moscow and executed, his followers dispersing and flying before the avenging justice, his cause lost, trampled on, and soon forgotten.

And meanwhile Catherine was growing older. The girl in the soldier's dress, riding at the head of her troops, was gone ; in her place was the Empress who worked sometimes fifteen hours a day in the governing and reforming of the

Empire of Peter the Great, whose picture she had painted on her snuff-box, to remind her that she must carry on his unfinished work. And Orloff was still her favourite, though at last his indolence and lack of intelligence were beginning to tire her, that ardent, imperious spirit of hers needing a greater depth, chafing a little, wearying even of the man's superb beauty that seemed only an empty husk.

But when in 1771 the Plague broke out in Moscow, nearly devastating the whole city, and Gregory, shaking himself from his lethargy, went off and, by almost superhuman courage and energy, enforced quarantine and put down the disorders and massacres, he was again for a short, transient moment the hero who had won a throne. And when, the epidemic quelled, he returned to Petersburg Catherine welcomed him with outstretched arms and tear-wet eyes, erecting a triumphal arch in his honour at Tsarskoe, apparently falling once more under the sway of his influence, that had seemed for a moment to be on the wane.

But Gregory soon made the fatal mistake of thinking himself indispensable and too securely established to be forgotten. So, a few months after his return from Moscow, he left Petersburg again to act as ambassador in the negotiations with the Turks, who had just been defeated by Roumantsioff. And scarcely had he gone when Catherine, malicious laughter in her eyes, replaced him by Vassilchikoff, a young officer in the Guards, who had attracted her attention, and who now took up his residence in the superb apartments of the favourite adjoining the Winter Palace.

Warned of what had happened, Gregory hurried back across the vast immensity of Russia, only to find that the way to the capital was barred, and that, on pretence of quarantine, he was kept practically a prisoner in his estates at

Gatchina. An exchange of letters that in turn threatened and implored, commanded and entreated, followed between the cast-off favourite and the Empress. Till finally one evening, disobeying all injunctions, Gregory made his appearance at Court, walking, unannounced, into one of the rooms of the Winter Palace in the midst of a reception.

One can imagine the little murmur of consternation that ran round the circle of courtiers. Had he come with Catherine's permission? Surely not! Had he come then to create a scene? What was going to happen? Everybody knew the big man's passionate temper, the coarseness and brutality of which he was capable, and, in nervous silence, men and women made way for him, till at last he stood opposite the Empress, who was already seated at a card table.

They looked at each other a moment in silence, the woman in the rich Court dress whose figure had become corpulent and heavy, but whose beautiful eyes were still magnetic, imperious and dazzling; the man, enormous and superb, in spite of the prodigal life that was writing its tell-tale lines on his handsome face. A moment's silence—and who knows the thoughts that were in both their minds! Memories of the past, of their first meeting, of the first time he had held her in his arms, an unhappy and neglected wife, a woman whose life had been in danger, whom he had helped to save by his high-handed courage and daring. Then the tension snapped. With a little laugh Gregory sat down facing the Empress and, carelessly, as if he had but just interrupted his game, took up the cards, while the buzz of subdued conversation his coming had so abruptly hushed into silence once more filled the big gold-painted room.

Vassilchikoff was, however, only a passing light like Karsakoff, Mamonoff or Zavadovski, who, capturing

Catherine's wandering fancy, either by their beauty, their strength or their wit, scandalised the Courts of Europe and cost such vast expense to the Treasury of Russia. He was to be supplanted and succeeded very quickly by the man who, though officially only favourite of the Empress for a comparatively short time, was by the overwhelming strength of his influence and his personality practically to govern Russia for seventeen years.

That summer morning when Catherine rode from Petersburg to Peterhof to win a Crown, there had been among the soldiers who followed her an unknown and insignificant lieutenant called Potemkin. The legend that it was he who gave her the badge of the Regiment or the plume that had been forgotten, and, looking up into her radiant face, laid his wild, untamed heart at her feet, has been doubted by many historians ; but it is certain that he was there among the rabble of soldiers who, cheering and singing, followed her along the dusty road, and it seems probable too that it was then that she inspired him with the strange uncouth devotion which he never quite forgot. Fourteen years later, one of his eyes having been knocked out in a quarrel with Alexis Orloff, hideous, enormously tall, with a wriggling walk, knees that knocked together and extravagant gestures, he came into her life again, and by the sheer force of an extraordinary individuality, won the possession of almost complete power, not only over Catherine, but over the Empire.

He was made a Member of the Council and Minister of War, and controlled even the Foreign Policy ; his voice was listened to in everything, and for two years Catherine seemed completely subjugated by him. Like Orloff, he aspired to win her hand in marriage, but his ruse of acted repentance failed to trick a woman who was too consummate an actress

herself not to see through the pretence of others, and shortly after Zavadovski took his place as favourite.

But Potemkin was not the man easily to give up everything he had won. He was still Member of the Council, still Minister of War, still the man who could master the will of the Empress even when he was no longer her lover. She could replace him in her affections with a younger and handsomer man, but she could not replace the giant who was so unlike anybody else, the Cyclops with his one eye, who alone it seemed thoroughly understood her, whose ready wit amused her, whose very queerness subjugated her.

And, woman all through as well as Empress, she was now in need of devotion, bitterly hurt and wounded in her pride ; for Gregory Orloff, whose one great, supreme passion she had believed herself to be, had had the temerity to fall in love with his cousin, Mademoiselle Zinoveieff. It is true that he had been faithless over and over again, but it had always been just a passing whim, never a real love ; and though she herself had cast him off, and replaced him, she felt herself almost insulted to think that the man she had believed her slave, should be wanting to place the devotion that had been hers at the feet of a mere girl, one of the youngest and prettiest of her maids of honour. At first bitterly opposing and forbidding the marriage, she ended at last by consenting, and, veering round completely, overwhelmed the newly married pair with gifts of priceless value.

The union was an ideally happy one. Gregory had turned into a model husband, his young wife worshipped the ground he walked on. But their ecstasy was, alas, to be all too brief. The man whose wealth was almost fabulous, whose strength had always been unbeaten, whose power had been incredible, could do nothing to save the girl he loved

from the encroaches of her fatal disease. Flying from the climate of Petersburg, travelling in desperate search of new doctors and new cures, the Princess Orloff faded from day to day, and died at last in Lausanne, leaving Gregory a broken and desperate man. He returned to Russia almost at once, but gradually his reason gave way completely, and he would sit raving and muttering, his big hands plucking at his hair, whispering to himself the names of his wife, of Catherine, of Peter, whose accusing ghost seemed to follow him in the darkness and despair of his torment.

Six months later Catherine wrote to Grimm announcing the death of the man whose strong hand had helped her up the steps of a throne. In her letter she declared that she suffered terribly, but it seemed as if her unconquerable gaiety soon overcame her sorrow, and she had too, to console her, a lover who some writers declare was the greatest passion of her life.

Indeed for a little over four years Lanskoi received from her a worshipping love that would have been almost grotesque had it not been somewhat pathetic, for Catherine was then fifty-five and Lanskoi almost twenty-six. He was also in no way remarkable for anything but his good looks and ardent, passionate nature; gentle and submissive, adaptable, fond of study and ready to be taught, he had caressing ways, and a delicate indolence that hid a fire few suspected. When in 1784 he died from a malignant fever and affection of the throat, Catherine, who had nursed him devotedly, gave way to poignant and heart-broken grief, shutting herself up at Tsarskoe and refusing to see anyone.

The Palace she had made so beautiful was empty and gloomy all during those summer months. The pavilion in the park, with the skilfully constructed table, that could be raised or lowered through the floor so as to make the presence

of servants unnecessary, was silent and unused, dust and cobwebs gathering on the walls. The Chinese Gardens echoed to no sounds of laughter and gaiety, no music was heard in the ballroom, no dancing feet glided over the polished floor ; only alone in her room a woman, whose beauty was just a memory, sat and mourned. So far away now the child who had played on the square at Stettin, and been known to the stolid citizens as *Figchen*. This woman, ravaged by her passions, weeping for a love that she knew was irreplaceable, drawing her curtains against the light of day, refusing to see her son or his wife, letting the affairs of State lie idle, bore no resemblance either to the girl with the transparent complexion, the big starry eyes, and one intense, unchildlike desire to be Empress of Russia.

The ardent, Imperial temperament that denied itself nothing, that superabundant vitality and joy of life, that inextinguishable gaiety and flow of spirits—who can, with all that, attempt to explain, accuse or utterly condemn her ? “ To tempt or be tempted,” she says in her Memoirs, “ are things very nearly allied. No sooner is feeling excited than we have gone already greatly further than we are aware of, and I have yet to learn how it is possible to prevent the arousing of interest and curiosity. Flight perhaps is the only remedy, but there are circumstances at a Court in which flight becomes impossible. And if you do not fly there is nothing, it seems to me, so difficult to escape from as that which is essentially agreeable.”

Certainly it does not seem as if she ever tried to escape from anything that might be agreeable. All the gifts life had to offer she grasped at with both hands, gathered every flower that grew along her path, opened every door. Remembering her vanity, her boundless ambition, her occasional, callous cruelty, her utter immorality, one might be tempted

to call her dissolute and corrupt, entirely unworthy of any sympathy. But against all this one must place the magnificent greatness of her work, her marvellous system of government, her boundless energy, her unfailing kindness to her servants and all around her, her love of children and of animals.

The pictures one has of her playing with her grandsons at Tsarskoe, carrying out the Forfeits in the games at the Hermitage by sitting on the floor ; hastily putting out the fire she was lighting early one morning, and addressing humble apologies to the little sweep she had caught cleaning the chimney ; or feeding the birds outside her window at the Winter Palace every day at the same hour, all of them hardly accord with the terrible picture of a heartless tyrant, a Cleopatra, or a Semiramis.

But the Catherine who wept in her darkened room at Tsarskoe was no longer the autocrat or the Empress, but just a woman who mourned with bitter tears the lost love of a fast vanishing youth, and it was not till Potemkin returned from the Crimea in the autumn that she was able to shake off her enveloping melancholy and take up her abode once more in the capital. Even then the manner of her return showed how far from balanced and normal she was, for, leaving Tsarskoe at a moment's notice, she came to Petersburg late one evening, found both the Winter Palace and the Hermitage locked up with no one ready to receive her, forced an entry, went quietly to bed, and waking at midnight, ordered the salvo of guns that usually welcomed her arrival to be fired immediately, thereby startling peaceful citizens from their sleep.

Soon, however, her usual optimism and merriment conquered her melancholy, and Yermoloff and Mamonoff, skilfully introduced by Potemkin, each in turn took the place

of the man she had mourned with such heart-broken abandonment and regret.

Potemkin had now conquered the Crimea—or Tauride Peninsula—and in January, 1787, Catherine and her Court set out on that famous journey whose boundless expense passes all imagination. For the distance between Petersburg and Kiev there were—besides the immense carriage of the Empress, which, drawn by thirty horses, contained a card room and library as well as a sleeping compartment—fourteen other big carriages and a hundred and twenty-four sledges. Wooden palaces with spacious bedrooms, and covered galleries, where huge banquets were laid out, had been put up all along the route, and the plates of gold or silver, the china and linen, having been used once, were left behind for the use of the servants.

At Kiev the Empress and her suite embarked on eighty raft-like ships with silken hangings and cabins furnished with incredible luxury, while all along the shores of the Dnieper Potemkin, that master of stage-craft, had peopled the desolate country with picturesque villages, flocks of grazing cattle, singing peasants and flower-wreathed girls.

At Kaniof, Poniatowsky, spending a fortune for the sake of three quarters of an hour with his former mistress, came to meet Catherine, and was received on board her ship. It was nearly thirty years since they had parted, and one wonders whether he found in the stout, Imperial lady any resemblance to the girl who, dressed as a man, had stolen out of a sleeping palace to come and meet him ! And did she see, in the broken, despairing man with the sad eyes, still anything of the lover of those early days who had so quickly consoled her for Soltikoff's many infidelities ?

She had given him her love and proved faithless to him all too soon. She had given him a crown and was taking away

his kingdom. And yet, when they met on that fairy-tale ship perhaps the ambitions and sadness and shadows of the passing years fell away, and they were no longer Empress and King, but just a man and woman who had loved each other and who had many memories, both glad and sad, to talk over during those few short moments before they parted.

At Kerson Catherine was met by the Emperor Joseph II. of Austria, and the rest of the journey was continued by land, with always Potemkin, the incomparable stage manager, to provide one stupendous surprise after another—a palace built for one night's magnificent entertainment, fire-works on a scale never seen before, magic gardens growing in the desert, a village springing up in a few hours.

Very soon was the brilliant star of this strangest of all favourites to go down. Squinting with his one eye, his great knees knocking together, his face sallow and twisted and ugly, one wonders what magic it was that held Catherine all the time under the spell of his influence, her imperious will overshadowed and subjected by the mastery of his weird personality. A curious mixture he was all through, of tempestuous rages and boisterous good humour, of sudden, reckless bravery and arrant cowardice. Appearing now dressed in cloth of gold, studded with diamonds, or else receiving Ambassadors wrapped in a loose, not over-clean dressing-gown, his bare feet thrust into carpet slippers.

And it was not only Catherine who fell under his charm, for his gallantries were proverbial at a Court where morals were anything but unimpeachable. In the Crimea he lived like a sultan surrounded by a harem ; and while the Generals attacked the Turkish positions, the Commander-in-Chief presided over gorgeous banquets, with beautiful women to keep him company. The lovely Princess Dolgorouki, his

niece, the Countess Branicki, the famous Countess Potocki, another niece, married to a Prince Galitzin, Praskovia Zakreïvska, married to another Potemkin ; they all at one time or another had the great man at their feet, were overwhelmed with costly presents, fêted, worshipped in the lavish, extravagant way that only he knew how to carry out.

Soon after his victory in the second Turkish war he returned to Petersburg as a national hero, drawn there too by the news that the favourite Mamonoff was about to be replaced by Platon Zouboff, the last lover Catherine was to have, and one who was a serious menace to Potemkin. The marvellous fête he gave her in the Tauride Palace was his final farewell to her, and it seems almost as if something must have warned her that she was losing him for ever ; for, when at the end, he escorted her to the door, and bent his great shaggy head to kiss her hand, there were tears dimming her eyes and her emotion was so great that she could hardly speak. Shortly after he left once more for Moldavia and, on his way from Jassy to Nikolaïeff, died on October 5th, 1791, by the roadside, having steadily refused to listen to the doctor's advice and remain at Jassy to cure himself.

Catherine's grief at her former favourite's death was real and unfeigned, for she knew that in him she lost a true friend, a mind which, great, extravagant, grotesque and imperious, had understood her ; a heart which, savage, untamed and faithless, had yet loved her. She was sixty now. There was no vestige left of the radiant beauty that had made so many men her slaves, yet her urgent ceaseless need for adoration made her keep Platon Zouboff in those gorgeous apartments of the Palace especially put aside for the Favourites, and made her blind to the young man's fatuous, foolish insolence, to his overweening ambition and vanity. Had she indeed lost so much wisdom and sense of proportion

that she had forgotten her years, or could not see the mockery of Zouboff's flattery and adulation ?

It seems hard to believe, and yet "the child," as she called him, wormed his way more and more into her favour. Slim and dark and young, uneducated and ignorant, and yet winning incredible power and influence ; ministers, courtiers, foreign diplomats, sued for his favour, while he amassed ever more riches and honours, there seeming no limit to his grasping, ambitious vanity.

The glory of Catherine had fallen indeed. Europe tittered mockingly to see an old woman still play at love and allow herself to be fooled by a pretty, conceited boy ; whilst Russia muttered in secret discontent. But the will of the Empress was a law which nobody dared gainsay, and, to win her smile, courtiers flattered her with praise of her favourite.

There had, it was said, always been a lucky star shining above her head to bring success to every project that she had formed ; but suddenly it seemed as if that star had fallen, as if success was to be no more the dazzling, easy victory she had grown used to. For years the war with Sweden had harassed Russia, the enemy at one time getting so near to the capital that their guns could be heard in the Winter Palace ; but Gustav III. had been assassinated in the middle of a masked ball and his son reigned in his stead, under the regency of his uncle, the Duke of Suderman.

To marry the young king to her eldest granddaughter, Alexandra Pavlowna, had been the Empress's most cherished dream, as she hoped in that way to bind the two great Northern countries together, and to put an end to the constant petty warfare over Finland and the Baltic Provinces. So nearly did her project succeed that the young King Gustav IV. was brought to Petersburg by his uncle and was on the point of becoming betrothed to the Grand Duchess

Alexandra when, at the last moment, the question of religion intervened, the negotiations to tide over the difficulty failed, and the public insult of that failure was a blow from which the old Empress never fully recovered, her gaiety and good humour eclipsed under fits of sullen brooding, or gusts of violent rage against the boy who had dared so obstinately to hold out against her.

At last, however, she seemed to regain some of her old joyousness, and the evening of November 4th was passed at the Hermitage as merrily as of old, with Léon Narishkin, the inevitable Court buffoon, bringing tears of laughter to everybody's eyes. The next morning Catherine rose at her usual hour of five, and attended to some of her correspondence, gay, active, clear-minded and determined as ever. Presently, excusing herself to the last secretary with whom she had been discussing her affairs, she rose to retire to her garde-robe, a stately figure still, leaning only very slightly on the long stick she always carried.

The secretary withdrew into the ante-room, yawned perhaps once or twice, and sat down to wait. No sound came to disturb the warm, lighted silence, while outside the grey darkness of a winter's morning lay over the snow-bound town. In the distance the great Palace hummed with its teeming life and activity. Doors opened and shut, voices whispered and called to each other. The arms of a sentry rang in a quick salute, the sword of some passing officer clattered on the floor, a maid, carrying a cup of coffee on a tray, dropped a curtsy to a lady-in-waiting who, passing down one of the long corridors, filled it with the rustle of her wide silk skirts. In the apartments of the *Demoiselles d'Honneur* there was the sound of subdued laughter ; a folded note had been pushed under the door for somebody, and was being read aloud to a circle of half-dressed girls. A moujjik carrying a basket of

heavy logs of wood, toiled up one of the many staircases. Somewhere in the basements a dog barked shrilly ; in the huge kitchen a big grey cat purred in front of the blazing fire.

After more than half an hour had passed the secretary, getting alarmed at the Empress's long absence, called Zotoff, her *valet de chambre*, who in turn summoned her women, and finally, after calling in vain at her door and receiving no answer, Catherine was found, stretched rigid and motionless, on the floor of one of the inner rooms. What a commotion then in the vast building ! Messengers flying in all directions, doctors summoned ; Platon Zouboff, dishevelled and trembling, called in haste ; women crying, men looking at each other with pale, dismayed faces. From the first it was clear that there was no hope of any possible recovery, and it meant more, so infinitely more, than just the death of a woman and a mistress they all loved ; it meant the end of a great reign, the beginning of a new one, and a master everybody feared.

Laid on a mattress in the big bedroom with its silken hangings, its gold mirrors, its gilt chairs and soft cushions, Catherine lived on for thirty-seven hours in that speechless, rigid agony, while Paul, summoned in haste from Gatchina, went through her papers. Did he discover among them the document that disinherited him ? And did he burn it hastily with trembling hands ? Impossible to say. Catherine never recovered her speech, and the only paper that was made public was the order of succession, signed by her in 1767, which made Paul Emperor.

So, at the age of sixty-eight, in the year 1796, died Catherine of Russia, the great Empress, the astute stateswoman, the dreaded tyrant, the philosopher, the writer, and the woman : sending out orders to her Generals, interview-

ing foreign representatives, presiding over the Council, corresponding with Voltaire, Grimm and Diderot ; buying priceless collections of pictures, supervising the building of Palaces, the planting of gardens, the founding of universities and schools ; laughing gaily at misfortune, loving with the abandonment of a generous, vital nature, giving and taking with the same whole-hearted liberality ; dreaming great dreams of dazzling splendour and unbounded power.

The mighty work Peter the Great had begun Catherine the Great carried on, making barbaric Eastern Russia into a civilised power, creating a Court whose brilliance rivalled that of Versailles, enforcing Western ideas, Western education, art and literature into everything. It was Catherine who introduced vaccination into Russia, sending for the English doctor, Dimsdale, and being herself the first to undergo the treatment. Adding to Peter's gallery of pictures at the Hermitage, she bought the collections of Count Brühl and Sir Robert Walpole, the latter being worth £36,000, while at the same time she added sculptures, priceless vases, china, tapestries and antique terra cotta to the collection.

It was Catherine, too, who founded the Smolny Institute for the education of the daughters of the aristocracy and higher bourgeoisie. Continued on practically the same lines she had laid down, the big white building, with its blue-domed Church, was later on taken by the Bolsheviks for the Soviet headquarters, and in the wide, spacious corridors, the white-ceilinged rooms, where young girls had confided whispered secrets to each other, and laughed, and sometimes perhaps cried over a fancied sorrow, bearded men in dirty shirts dreamt savage dreams of blood and revenge and hate.

But it is at Tsarskoe most of all that one gets the memories of Catherine the woman, as well as the Empress. The great white Palace with its bright green roof looks out on one side

into a wide courtyard entered by three high iron gates; on the other it rises above the gardens and the lake, with the yellow marble column erected in the honour of Alexis Orloff on the occasion of his victory over the Turks at Tschesmé.

A little to the right and above the lake is the Chinese garden, with its wandering canals and swan pond, its carved bridge of imitation coral, with the quaint stone figures holding open parasols, and further on the theatre built by Cameron. On the other side of the lake, in the green shadow of the Park, is the white Heritage, the Concert Hall and the Grotto, and, opening from the Palace and overhanging the lake, Cameron's gallery, where Catherine walked on rainy days followed by her English greyhounds, named the family of Sir Tom Anderson.

Peterhof held too many bitter, haunting memories of the past, so it was at Tsarskoe that Catherine spent all her summers, decorating and furnishing the Palace that had been built originally by Elisabeth. The Amber Room with its primrose yellow panels; the Wedgwood Room with its delicate plaques of blue and white; the ballroom with its long mirrors; the black and gold Chinese Room; the Lapis Lazuli Room, deep blue and gold; the bedroom with its columns of silver, its cunningly arranged mirrors and painted ceiling; the dressing-room all agate and gold—everywhere the spirit of Catherine is present, the tapping of her cane on the polished parquet floors, the rustle of her purple silk dress, the sound of her gay infectious laughter, the yapping of the dogs that always followed her.

An old lady with wonderful eyes and the proud majestic bearing that, in her youth, had wrung a sharp rebuke from the Empress Elisabeth, and impatient abuse from a feeble-minded husband—so she passes one in the shady walks of the Park, in the dim shadows of the Palace rooms; and one

forgets, listening to the echo of her long dead laughter, the woman who so carelessly swept aside her husband, dismembered Poland, conquered the Crimea and spent millions on her lovers. One forgets the advice given to Madame le Brun who had in vain craved the honour of painting her portrait and endeavoured to do it from memory : " Take for your canvas the Empire of Russia, the darkness of ignorance for your background, the remains of Poland for the drapery, human blood for your colouring, and for shadows six months of the reign of her son."

Other ghosts there are besides Catherine who haunt the Palace and gardens of Tsarskoe. Gregory Orloff, with his honey-coloured hair and perfect face. His brother Alexis, with his scarred cheek. Potemkin, the great, ugly, uncouth giant. The Countess Bruce and Mademoiselle Protassoff, mentioned by Byron in " Don Juan," the Countess Branicki and Princess Galitzin, nieces of Potemkin, Madame Ribas, daughter of the mysterious Betzky, who by some was supposed to be Catherine's natural father. The children of Paul who, with joyous voices, acclaimed the old Empress as the most adorable grandmother. The faithful Pierekoushina, her inseparable and devoted maid. Lanskoi, a delicate langour veiling the voluptuous fire of his nature. Korsakoff, laughingly named King of Epirus. The heavy, obese figure of Panin. Souvoroff, who later was to lead the Russian soldiers against the French.

Statesmen, philosophers, soldiers and courtiers, they come and go in the big rooms, in the shady avenues, in the narrow, twisting walk of the Chinese gardens. Here the flutter of a silken skirt, the rush of a pack of dogs, figures in brilliant colours, seen for a moment and gone—an empty Palace—despoiled of its treasures, the ghosts of dead splendour that dare no longer show their face.

It was at Tsarskoe, in the Alexander, or New Palace, built by Catherine in 1796, that the Emperor Nicholas lived for the greater part of the year. It was here that we came for our first audience with the Empress on our arrival in Russia in December, 1910, though the only memories I seem to have retained of that day are the picture of a park, fairy-like under newly fallen snow; mounted Cossacks riding slowly, in an unending circle, round the outer walls; the tall thin figure of old Count Benckendorff, superb in a glittering uniform with countless orders shimmering on his breast; a big room full of flowers, and a woman with a stern, tragic face, so different from the golden-haired Princess Alix of my childhood's recollections.

It was to Tsarskoe that the Emperor was brought in 1917 after he had signed the abdication, and it was here that he was kept for five months a prisoner, before being sent on to that grimmer exile of Siberia, with its unutterably tragic ending.

But there are, too, other gayer memories of Tsarskoe—memories of dances and picnics, and of a golden summer spent in a quaint old wooden house we rented for three months. It stood on the road leading up from the station, and at the back it had an open verandah and a green garden, where birds sang all day long and the scent of flowering lime-trees sweetened the air. The great excitement of the day was when the six o'clock train from Petersburg arrived, and the *Isvostchiks* (little one-horse cabs), filled with returning husbands, fathers and brothers, raced each other up the road at a hand gallop. For the rest there was not really much to do—long lazy mornings spent in the park, evening drives through the woods of Pavlosk, dinners and occasional dances at the Palace of the Grand Duchess Vladimir, or at one of the many villas in the surroundings. Now and then

perhaps an excursion in a motor to Krassnoe, Strelna or Peterhof.

On the occasion of her nameday, the Grand Duchess Vladimir gave a monster picnic at a spot about twenty miles from Tsarskoe whose name I have now forgotten. I remember only that we drove out there in an endless line of motors, had an enormous feast laid out on the grass with servants in court liveries to wait on us, a gay-coloured awning stretched over our head, and a band to play to us. Afterwards, on a specially constructed wooden platform, we danced, while the inhabitants of a nearby village, coming down through the woods, watched us with wide-opened, wondering eyes.

So the memories of Tsarskoe are sad with the unutterable sadness of broken hopes and gay with laughter and music—light and darkness !—tragedy and gladness ! Always in Russia, that land of mysteries, so near together.

CHAPTER VII

PAUL

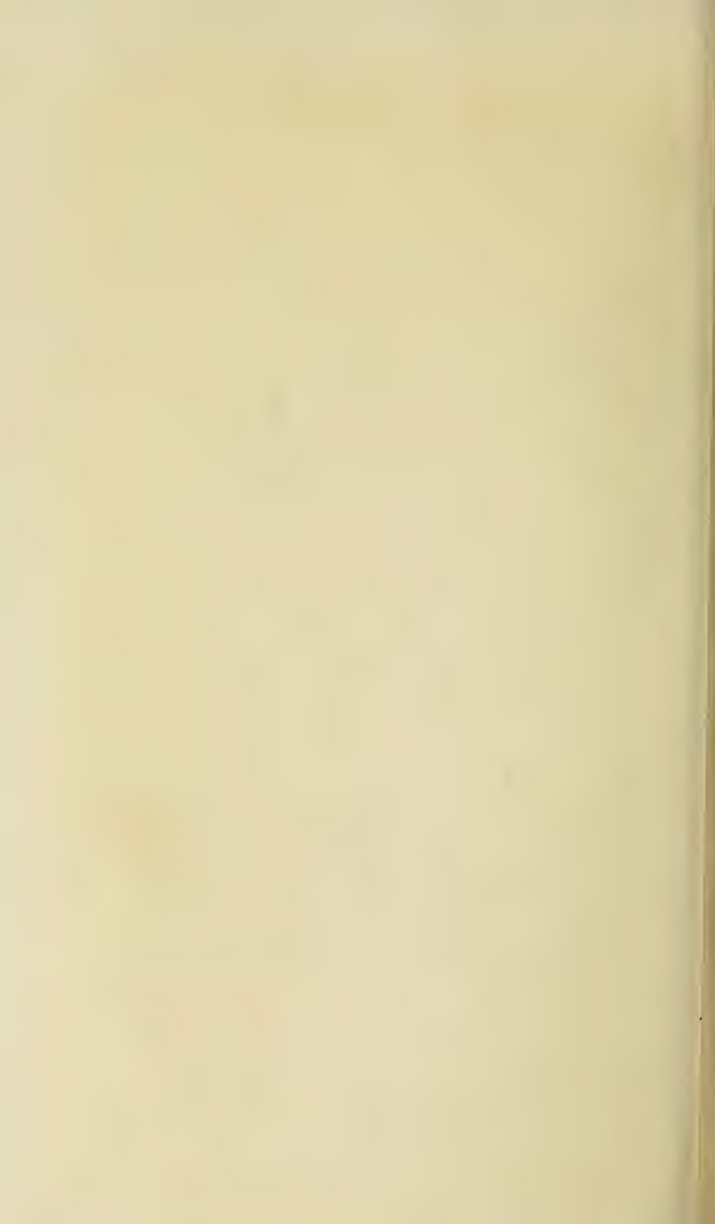
CLOSE to Tsarskoe lies the Park of Pavlosk, with its green slopes, its temples and pavilions, its tiny meandering river, its big yellow Palace, the model dairy farm, the pinewoods with their sandy tracks, the meadows where wild flowers scent the air and bees hum lazily in the heat of the summer afternoons.

In those old days the park of Pavlosk was always full. The Grand Duke Constantine and his family lived in the Palace, but the rest of the grounds were open to the public. Carriages came and went on the wide gravel roads. Nurses with bright coloured ribbon streamers pushed perambulators in the shadow of the great trees ; young girls with gaudy silk handkerchiefs tied loosely round their hair walked arm in arm on the grass ; boys on bicycles whizzed at break-neck pace down the hills ; old ladies sat and gossiped over their sewing on the benches ; old gentlemen dozed or read the newspapers ; children played with their boats on the miniature lake ; here and there a guardian of the park kept a watchful eye on the shifting crowd.

Memories of happy days seem to linger regretfully at Pavlosk. Crowding together in the Family Grove, where every tree commemorates the birth of a child ; whispering and laughing in the Temple of Friendship ; in the small Garden House with painted walls which Marie Feodorowna



MOSCOW IN WINTER.



decorated with her own hands ; and, finger on lip, pause in the *Pavillon des Roses*, where, in the big dancing-room with its parquet floors, garlands of imitation roses hang from the chandeliers, drooping a little wearily as if they found the hours of waiting over long. Roses there are everywhere ; painted on the walls, embroidered on the tapestried chairs, carved in stucco over the doors, looking in at the windows, growing in wild confusion in the little garden, covering the paths with the fading sweetness of their windblown petals. The scent of living roses steals in through the open windows and mingles with the scent of those who have long been dead in the silent rooms.

Dead roses and dead laughter, the ghost-like echo of a far-away violin, the whisper of satinskirts, the tapping of little high-heeled shoes. Ghost-like reflections that seem to pass in the mirrored reflection of the polished floor. Paul, with his sombre, sullen face, the eyes, beautiful in themselves, but watchful always in an evil suspicion. The Grand Duchess Marie Feodorowna, glowing with radiant youth and health, happy still in her love for her husband and her children. Young Count Panin, whose name one day was to figure on the list of those who plotted against Paul. Mademoiselle Nelidoff, small and frail, fanatical almost in her romantic, spiritual ardour. The shadows shift and waver, the petals of dead roses fall with a little sigh.

By many historians Paul has been described as the most unhappy of all Russians, and some have accused him of having no single, redeeming feature to give one even the faintest sympathy with him in his misery, while others have made him out misunderstood, and totally misjudged. Perhaps that September day when his wondering eyes first saw the light was grey and dull as September days can be in Northern Russia. Outside in the summer gardens the yellow

leaves were falling from the shivering trees and the water in the Fontanka Canal was the colour of mud beneath the leaden sky. And the room where he was born was one of the dreariest and most cheerless in the Summer Palace, furnished poorly, with doors and windows that rattled in the wind with walls stained by the damp and brocaded hangings that were torn and dingy.

Directly after his birth the Empress Elisabeth took him away from his mother into her own apartments, and there he was wrapped in yards of flannel, and put in a wonderful cradle draped in the skins of black fox, and he was covered first with a satin eiderdown lined with cotton-wool, and over that with a rose velvet coverlet lined again with black fox furs. Poor little Royal baby, later to be one of the most tragic figures in his tragic country, lying there half suffocated by heat, surrounded by a lot of old women who overwhelmed him with useless and foolish attentions.

The grey, dismal days of the autumn passed, and only once during the next six months was Catherine allowed to see her son. "I found him very beautiful," she says with a certain pathetic wistfulness; and then gradually she seems to have lost all interest in him. Taken from her so soon, it must have seemed to her that he hardly belonged to her. She had of his birth only the memory of her anguish, and of the neglect that followed it, when she was left for three hours while the nurse accompanied the Empress with the baby, and Mademoiselle Vladislava, left alone with Catherine, dared not arrange her pillow or give her a drink of water without permission. During the next summer, too, Poniatowski came to Russia, and in the first golden glamour of that romance, the secret meetings, the danger of discovery, the constant intrigues, Catherine almost forgot the baby son growing up in that Court with its strange mixture of refine-

ment and coarseness, of dazzling luxury and hopeless sordidness.

The Empress herself, who at first had half suffocated the child with her caresses, soon began to tire of the drag on her time, and left him to the care of others, who instilled into his mind a terror of her that caused him to shrink away whenever she approached him. Fear, hatred, jealousy, suspicion: on these was the future Emperor brought up. Now nearly smothered with attentions and affection, now scolded, tired of, pushed roughly away. At one moment held up by the Empress as a threat against her nephew and his wife that, passing over them, she would make the baby her direct heir. At another neglected and abandoned while Elisabeth brooded over the thought of releasing Ivan, the unhappy son of Anna Leopoldovna, from his prison and restoring to him the crown of which she had robbed him.

Kept in the inner apartments of the Palace, the little Prince was hardly ever allowed to go out; never had any regular hours of meals; was surrounded by a crowd of nurses, maids and children who all fought and quarrelled; was neglected very often, hungry, tired, shivering with cold or suffocated with heat. And delicate the child always was, sensitive, with a difficult humour, nerves that betrayed him at every moment, an imagination that was from the first uncontrolled and unbalanced.

On the death of Elisabeth the atmosphere at Court became even more disturbed and convulsed. It was well-known that Peter wished to divorce his wife and disinherit his son; it was whispered that, in an interview with Serge Soltikoff, he had tried to induce the latter to acknowledge the child's illegitimacy, and Soltikoff having refused to give him any satisfaction, had exiled him to his estates in the country; it was even rumoured that the Emperor had been

to see the imprisoned Ivan at Schlüsselburg with the intention of putting him in the place of his son.

The intrigues, the conspiracies, the rumours, all reached their head at last in the *coup d'état* of the 28th June, 1762, which deprived Peter of the throne and made Catherine sole ruler of Russia. Paul was eight years old at the time, but the report that Peter's death at Ropscha was not due to natural causes reached his ears all too soon, producing its inevitable impression on his imaginative mind, while the fatal suspicion that his mother had been the cause of that death began to grow, contaminating his nature like a poisonous germ of evil. That beautiful, arrogant, vivacious mother with her quick humour, her dominating personality—the delicate sensitive child shrank away from her, falling ever deeper into the silent brooding that was to lead his mind to such a sombre, sinister trend.

And for Catherine the child was always in a way an adversary to be feared. She had, by sheer courage and resolution, wrested to herself the Crown; but among the voices that acclaimed her there were many that still called for Paul, considering him the rightful heir to the throne, Ill as he was, she dared not leave him behind when she went to Moscow for her coronation; feverish and ailing, he had to go with her on that long journey across the plains. Though confined to his bed, and unable to take part in any of the ceremonies, he must, in his room in the Kremlin, have heard the bells of Moscow ringing out their chime of welcome to the new Empress, the shouts of the people who cheered her; and perhaps, too, the voices that called insistently on his name.

The years dragged slowly on; the little grotesque figure, with the small, frail face, the snub nose, the wide mouth, grew into manhood, watched all the time suspiciously, held

almost a prisoner, surrounded by endless intrigues ; treated by his mother with indifference and harshness, with now and then, when she wished to impress somebody, bursts of passionate tenderness. With a hidden longing for love and sympathy, alternating between outbursts of hysterical rage and long fits of brooding and sulky resentment, he came at last to the age when it was necessary that a bride should be sought for him, and the Land Gräfin of Hesse with her three daughters was accordingly invited to Russia.

It was summer when she arrived, and Paul, having chosen Wilhelmina as his bride, the Court adjourned to Peterhof where, during the warm months of sunshine, the young German princess struggled with the difficulties of the Russian language, and was instructed in the teachings of the orthodox faith by Platon, Archbishop of Tver. Though she had no pretensions to good looks, she had the charm of youth, a joyousness that took pleasure in everything, a passionate desire for perpetual movement and amusement. To Paul she was almost a revelation, that secret craving of his made him stretch out his hands to her in a mute, imperfect appeal, for as an ardent and passionate lover he was perhaps hardly a success.

At last in September, Wilhelmina having been accepted into the Orthodox Church, and baptized under the name of Nathalie Alexeievna, the marriage was celebrated in the Kazan Cathedral in Petersburg, and was followed by an enormous banquet and ball at the Winter Palace. The Mark Gräfin of Hesse gives a picture of the magnificent splendour of the ceremonies, of the gorgeous costumes and uniforms, the blaze of priceless jewels ; and she describes in the middle of this the small, insignificant figure of the bridegroom opening the ball with his bride in her dress of silver brocade, so weighed down with diamonds and precious

stones that she could hardly move. She tells us, too, how the future Emperor and tyrant, wrapped in a gorgeous silver dressing-gown, had supper with her while Catherine led Nathalie to her apartments, and she adds somewhat naïvely, "It was not so ridiculous as you might suppose."

The incessant chatter and laughter of his young wife, her constant gaiety, the bustle of her charades, her dancing, and her insatiate need of amusement, must have allowed Paul little time for his sullen brooding, must have lightened a little the darkness of his surroundings. All too soon, however, the shadows gathered round his path. Panin, who was the one person he loved, was removed from his service by Catherine and replaced by Michael Soltikoff, an act which caused a violent quarrel between her and her son, Paul having, however, to bow to her superior power, but storing up in his mind a vindictive rage at the humiliation of his forced surrender.

His married happiness, too, was marred by the suspicion cast on it by his mother that his friend André Razumovsky was his wife's lover; and finally it was wrecked in utter tragedy when in April, 1773, the Grand Duchess Nathalie died in childbirth. Overwhelmed by grief Paul came near to losing his reason, while the Court whispered and tittered and every kind of rumour was circulated. Quite confidently it was affirmed that when the child was born dead, and the doctors gave their opinion that there was no possible chance of the Grand Duchess ever having another, the Empress decided that she should, quietly and painlessly, be allowed to die. It was declared that there had been gross and culpable negligence in the way she had been treated. While the most popular belief was that the Grand Duchess had been born with a malformation, and that her mother was entirely to blame for never having divulged the truth.

So the unfortunate girl was laid to rest in St. Alexander Nevsky, and she who had loved life and movement was quiet at last, and soon forgotten by all save her husband—and perhaps André Razumovsky.

In his Memoirs Count Feodor Golovkin asserts that after Nathalie's death, in order to cure Paul of his grief, he was informed of the true state of things, that—though before he had always refused to believe his wife unfaithful—he was now allowed no room for doubt, and consequently refused to see or speak to his friend again. Whether this is true or not, it is certain that he was not allowed much time for mourning, for, only two months later, he was sent to the Court of Frederick II. at Berlin to meet the Princess Sophie Dorethée of Würtemberg Montbeliard. She was engaged at the time to Prince Louis of Darmstadt, Nathalie's brother, but the scheming brains of Catherine, Frederick II., and Prince Henry of Prussia broke off the projected marriage with callous indifference. What did human heart's matter? Or young affections, when it was a question of politics?

Very quickly the matter was settled; in September already Sophie Dorethée had abjured Protestantism; had received the name of Marie Feodorowna and was married to Paul.

Tall, stately, glowing with youth and health, "*Taille de nymphe, un teint de lys et de rose*," according to Catherine's words, she had none of the unfortunate Nathalie's restless craving for perpetual amusement. Gentle and submissive, she was yet gay and sunny tempered, loved country life and simple occupations, and had been blessed, too, with a great gift for painting and embroidery. In 1777 Catherine gave Paul the estate of Pavlosk near Tsarskoe, and, tearing her husband from his sombre reflections, the young Grand Duchess made him take an interest in the plans for the

Palace, the laying out of the extensive grounds, the building of little Temples. It was here that they formed their circle : a small and intimate court of their own, and Paul could throw off the burden of his thoughts, forget the constant pin-pricks which wounded and offended his pride, the neglect and indifference with which he was treated.

In December, 1777, their first child Alexander was born, and, delighted with her grandchild, Catherine kept him in her own apartments, lavishing on him all the love she had never given her own children. She was scarcely less delighted when the second little boy, Constantine, was born in 1779 ; and when in 1781 Paul and Marie Feodorowna started on their European tour, the Empress kept the two children with her, regardless of their mother's grief at having to leave them.

As Comte and Comtesse du Nord, Paul and his wife passed through Poland and Vienna, where they were received with great honour and many festivities by Joseph II. Then going on to Italy they stayed at Venice, Rome and Naples, returning by Florence and Milan till finally they came to France, to Paris and the Court of Versailles, then already tottering on the brink of revolution. But in those brilliant May days, banquets, concerts, balls and excursions following each other in endless succession, there seemed no premonition of coming disaster, and Paul and his wife remained a month—finally and regretfully continuing their journey to Belgium and Holland ; then to Montbelliard, Marie Feodorowna's home, and so on to Vienna and back to Petersburg in November. The grey, hopeless November of Russia ; the displeasure of Catherine, her stern reprimands to her son for not having been conciliatory enough in his attitude at Vienna and Paris ; her scandalised disapproval of her daughter-in-law's extravagance ; her insistence on the boxes

of French clothes and head-dresses being sent back unopened.

Retiring to Pavlosk, where the big Palace was almost completed, the young couple set to work to beautify their domain with the treasures they had brought back from Italy and France; priceless furniture, pictures, sculptures, Sèvres china, tapestry and costly books. Marie Feodorowna embroidered, painted, collected dried flowers, started her model dairy, tried to amuse and distract her husband, while, with passing time, one little girl after another was added to the increasing family—Alexandra, Helen, Marie, Catherine, Olga, Anna and yet one more son, Nicholas. The Palace at Gatchina had now also been given to Paul, and he began to spend most of his time there, further away from his mother's watchful eye, drilling his soldiers, fostering the autocratic pride that was, so fatally, to turn him into a tyrant.

Swiftly, with all their various incidents, the years passed by. There were the constant attacks of Sweden on Russia; there were the wars with the Turks, the annexation of the Crimea; Catherine's triumphal journey—and all the time Paul treated with contemptuous indifference, in spite of his entreaties allowed only once to go to the Swedish Front, and there not allowed to take any active part; sent back to Petersburg almost in disgrace, his rancour and resentment piling itself up, embittering his already sullen, morose nature.

He allowed himself, too, to be swept away by the new taste for mysticism that had crept across Europe to Russia, and persuaded himself that his passion for Catherine Nelidoff was purely spiritual; that it was her soul, her mind, her artistic temperament that inspired him. The Court could see in their intimacy nothing but the obvious intrigue that was only to be expected from a son of Catherine. Marie

Feodorowna, virtuous to a point of austerity, wounded to the quick in her pride of wife and mother, withdrew into herself, and the charm of affectionate intimacy that had been a characteristic of the Court of Pavlosk was broken.

It was from this time that Paul seemed to model himself more and more on Peter III. Was he, perhaps, after all the son of the unhappy monarch murdered at Ropscha? Or did he merely seek to intensify some of his peculiarities? He fostered the same exaggerated admiration of Frederick II. of Prussia. He grew obsessed with the same pro-German ideas, the same passion for drills and parades, organising all his surroundings with military precision. His abnormal religious and mystical fanaticism increased. His treatment of his wife and children became daily more tyrannical, his moods were more sombre, his brooding thoughts ever more sinister.

In 1793 Alexander, his eldest son, married the Princess Elisabeth of Baden, a girl of fifteen, who, with all her beauty, was doomed to a life of misunderstood unhappiness and solitude; while the bride of the Grand Duke Constantine, Julie of Saxe Coburg, was still more miserable with her violent, intractable husband, the marriage finally being annulled in 1820. And yet the love story of Alexandra, Paul's eldest daughter, was perhaps the most tragic of all.

It was in August, 1796, that Gustave IV., the handsome, grave young King of Sweden, arrived in Petersburg, and almost at once it seemed that Alexandra gave him the ardour and romantic worship of her girl's heart. So long had she been brought up on his name and on the idea that he was one day to be her husband, that she was all too ready to see in him the realisation of her dreams. It seemed, too, as if the young king responded to her love; he had asked her hand in marriage, everything was going smoothly, and

September 2nd was chosen as the day of the public betrothal.

At the appointed hour the Court assembled in the Throne Room of the Winter Palace and waited for the arrival of the king. But the minutes passed by and added themselves to hours, the bride in her splendid dress flushed and paled alternately; the priests who were to bless the couple looked grave, the courtiers whispered and shrugged their shoulders; the old Empress was getting visibly nervous, Zouboff and Markoff came and went looking ever more perturbed. And still there was no sign of the King. Had there been an accident?

Was there some hitch? People gazed curiously at the poor little bride, standing there in her finery, striving in vain to keep up a dignified composure, the tears brimming in her eyes but still not allowed to fall.

At last, after waiting from six in the evening till ten, Markoff came back once more, and, with obvious consternation, whispered something in the Empress's ear, whereupon she rose abruptly and left the room without uttering a word. The courtiers were all summarily dismissed, and, white as a ghost, Alexandra retired to take off the dress she had put on with such a beating heart.

Only later was the curiosity of the Court satisfied and the true state of things published. At the last moment the King of Sweden had categorically refused to sign a document giving Alexandra the right to have her private Chapel and an Orthodox Priest to attend her. He had promised not to interfere with his wife's religion, but he could not and would not publicly support her in this way. Not an inch would he budge from this decision, neither threats nor persuasions could move him, and finally the engagement was definitely broken off. Gustave travelled back to Sweden: the young girl gazed sadly at the fragments of a rainbow-

coloured dream that lay shattered at her feet ; and, with the shadow of an unforgettable sorrow in her lovely eyes, tried to take up her life once more, only, married a little later to the Archduke Joseph of Austria, to die at the age of eighteen in giving birth to a child.

The disgrace of the broken engagement, their mutual humiliation and indignation might have brought Catherine and her son closer together ; but Paul isolated himself ever more completely at Gatchina, fostering that tyrannical despotic temper of his ; flying continually into violent rages which he made no effort to control ; suspecting everybody, even his wife whom he hardly let out of his sight, forcing her to accompany him in all weathers on his mimic parades and reviews, setting spies to watch her, threatening her continually that, if she fancied herself another Catherine, she would not find him a second Peter of Holstein.

But the day for which he had been waiting—the day towards which all his life had seemed to be tending—dawned at last, for on November 5th, 1796, the Great Catherine was struck down by an apoplectic stroke, never recovering her power of speech to utter the sentence Paul had dreaded : the sentence that would disinherit him and make his son, Alexander, Emperor.

What thoughts must have filled his mind during those long hours of waiting in the darkened room, listening to his mother's laboured breathing, watching her convulsed face ; while Platon Zouboff cowered, half dressed, in a corner ; the young Grand Duchesses sobbed and prayed in an adjoining room, and the courtiers crept about on tiptoe and dared not look at him. He had never had the love of this woman who now lay in her death agony—the man who was said to be his father had been deposed by her, probably murdered by her orders. She had treated him as a child always, allowing

him no independence, no liberty, no freedom. And now she was dying, his word would be all powerful, he could make men tremble at his frown ; there was nothing he could not do, his commands, however impossible, must be obeyed.

The dragging hours went all too slowly for him till the last breath passed the tortured lips of the Great Empress, making him Sovereign of Russia. The regiments, hastily called up from Gatchina, were drawn up on the Square before the Winter Palace, their strange uniforms drawing the curious gaze of the crowd ; the courtiers of Catherine prostrated themselves before their new master, the citizens of Petersburg acknowledged him as Emperor.

One of his first acts was to exhume the body of Peter III., buried in the cemetery of Alexander Nevsky, have it transported to the Winter Palace, and, in a coffin surmounted by an Imperial crown, placed next to the Catafalque where Catherine had been laid in state. Loathing each other in life, they were buried together, and Alexis Orloff, old and feeble but still full of dignity, was forced to walk behind the coffin of the Emperor whom, thirty-four years earlier, he was supposed to have murdered. And whether it was an act of devotion to the memory of his supposed father, or an act of vengeance and hatred to his mother, only Paul's half crazy brain could tell.

Filled with soldiers, the Winter Palace now resembled a beleaguered garrison, while every morning the Emperor drilled his new regiments and prided himself on being out in all weathers without an overcoat. Not only did he insist on a discipline that was rigorously severe, but he changed the old uniforms, brought in German ones ; ordered the soldiers, who had always worn their hair cut round their necks in the old Russian manner, to be powdered and wear the little false pigtail behind.

And steadily his unpopularity increased in the Army and desertion, which hitherto had been rare, became increasingly frequent. Every day new orders, one more ridiculous than the last, were issued, paralysing Petersburg and causing consternation through all the country. The old barbaric custom, forbidden by Peter, which insisted on those who met the Sovereign in the street descending from their carriages and prostrating themselves, was brought into force again, with the result that the streets of the capital were nearly deserted, as nobody wanted to go out and incur this necessity unless they were forced to do so.

The splendid painted sledges and coaches were all forbidden, even the old Russian harness had to be changed. A British merchant who was unaware of the new order that round hats were not allowed was arrested and beaten by soldiers who tore his hat from his head. Prince George Galitzin was imprisoned on one occasion because, when he kissed the Emperor's hand, he had not had sufficient reverence in his manner. A horse that had stumbled was starved to death by the order of the Autocrat of Russia.

Everywhere, in every class and every grade, his tyranny made itself felt; and one wonders whether it was just sheer love of power, or whether he tried to heap on himself the splendour and dignities of a Potentate, in order to make people forget his insignificant height, his snub nose, his high cheek-bones and bald head. That he was aware of his own ugliness is shown by the fact that he refused to have his head engraved on the coins of his realm, and insisted on having the cypher instead; while no man could join the new Pavlovsky Guard Regiment unless he had a snub nose—a rule that was carried out up till the Revolution.

For his coronation at Moscow in 1797, Paul's almost childish love of ceremonies and functions was allowed full

scope, and he could be the centre figure of all the magnificent pageantry. The festivities lasted over a week, the Emperor seeming never to tire of them, while the exhausted Courtiers nearly succumbed to fatigue, very often having no time to return to their houses between the various entertainments, and having to dress as best they could in passages or ante-rooms.

So, in the magnificent Uspensky Cathedral, which had seen the coronation of the first Tsar, the Holy Crown of Russia was placed on the forehead of the man who, had he not surrounded himself with a shadow of terror, would have perhaps been only supremely ridiculous; and the old walls of the Kremlin watched him strut in pompous dignity beneath their shadow and pass on to meet his tragic, inevitable destiny.

In Petersburg, meanwhile, the new St. Michael's Palace was being built with vast expense and haste on the site of the old Summer Palace. Some said that Paul's hatred for his mother was so intense that he would not live in rooms which held her memory. Others whispered that his dread of assassination was so great that he must have a palace as impregnable as a fortress, surrounded by a moat, approached only by a drawbridge. While at the same time a story was circulated that one of the guards of the Summer Gardens had insisted on being admitted to the Emperor and related how St. Michael had appeared to him three times during the night and had ordered him to tell the Emperor that he was soon to have another son, that he was to christen him Michael, and was to build a church and a palace and call them by the same name.

In January, 1798, Marie Feodorowna effectively gave birth to a son, who was in due course christened Michael, and the pink walls of the great palace rose at the end of the

Summer Gardens and the Champ de Mars. The little Grand Duke came into the world at midnight, but, by order of the Emperor, his birth had to be immediately announced to all the heads of diplomatic missions in Petersburg. Count Feodor Golovkin accordingly was forced to drive round the town in a state glass coach and insist on being admitted to every Embassy and Legation. Sleepy porters knocked up thus in the middle of the night refused to open the big doors, half-dressed servants had to be sent for, messages were brought that Their Excellencies were asleep and that it was impossible to wake them. But Golovkin, under the orders of the Tyrant, had to go against all commonsense, and peevish Ambassadors had to be torn out of warm beds, and, wrapped in gorgeous dressing-gowns, had to listen to the formal announcement of the birth of another son to the Empress of Russia.

It was a rule of terror, a fever of tyranny, which made Paul hated and detested by all his people. Even his wife had several times been placed under arrest, his children trembled before him, his Ministers plotted against him, his Courtiers, prostrating themselves before him, cursed him in their hearts. The beautiful, arrogant Madame Laphoukine had taken the place of Mademoiselle Nellidoff, who had retired to the Smolny Institute, the Empress herself going often to see her old-time rival, weeping with her over the growing madness of the man they both loved in spite of all his faults.

And meanwhile the plot against him grew into being, supporters coming from all sides to work for his downfall. Count Pahlen, Governor-General of Petersburg and Paul's most trusted friend, was the head of the conspiracy, and the names of Platon Zouboff and Nikita Petrovitch Panin were also on the list. The latter was the nephew of Paul's

former governor, and sharing his education had been his friend, and, later, his Vice-Chancellor, until, in one of his sudden fits of fury, Paul exiled him to his estates.

Alexander, Paul's eldest son, had also been approached, but had refused categorically to have anything to do with the conspiracy. It was explained to him that no harm would come to the Emperor, and that he would only be made Regent in his name. It was put before him that by this act alone could Russia be saved from the power of a madman; that Paul's increasing despotism, his crazy outbursts of anger, would in time ruin the country; that the lives of his mother, himself, his brothers and sisters were not safe for a moment.

At last, reluctantly, Alexander gave his name, but undecided and nervous, he kept on hesitating and putting off the final decision, till at last Pahlen insisted that the thing must be done without any further delay, as the dreaded Arakcheieff was being recalled from his temporary banishment to Siberia, and at the same time Paul was threatening to make war on some neighbouring states.

So at last the night of the 11th of March darkened over Petersburg, and a cold, starry sky stretched above the great, pink-walled Palace whose shadow lay black on the silver whiteness of the snow. At eleven the conspirators met together in the house of General Talitsin and, after drinking to the success of their enterprise, set out through the frost-bound silence. The loyal Semeyenoff Regiment, which had been on guard in the morning, had now been replaced by the Preobjenski, who were in the plot, so without any difficulty the drawbridges were let down, the great gates were swung silently open. The Emperor had already retired to bed; the whole vast building lay shadowed in sleep. Only one soldier tried to stop the band of conspirators, but was instantly struck down and pushed aside.

Woken up by the commotion of their approach, Paul started out of bed and looked round desperately for a way of escape. But the door that led to his wife's rooms had been barricaded by his special orders, urged by his terror of her plotting against him, and there was no other way out save by that door before which already the conspirators were standing. Hiding himself behind a screen the Emperor cowered in the shadows, listening to the voices of the men who now had forced themselves into his room, who, thinking he had escaped, were cursing each other in their frantic search for him. At last, by an abrupt movement, one of them knocked down the screen, and the miserable half-naked figure of the despot and the tyrant who, in revenge for his own darkened youth, had made his country tremble before him, stood before the men who had come to avenge that country's wrongs.

It is difficult to know exactly what followed, as in all the narratives the descriptions differ in some slight degree. Some say it was Benningsen who struck the Emperor down with a heavy gold snuff-box, others declare that when they said to him, "Majesty, you are arrested!" he tried madly to escape, that, caught back, he struggled, was knocked down in the general commotion, and that either Zouboff or Skelleret strangled him with a scarf. They had perhaps not meant to kill him; they were all a little drunk with wine and excitement, hardly conscious of what they were doing; but when they saw the huddled figure at their feet, the livid swollen face, a sudden hush fell on them—the horror of their accomplished act struck them into silence. Almost reverently they lifted up the poor, beaten body and laid it back on the bed, while an officer was despatched to Alexander to tell him what had happened and proclaim him Emperor.

With all the pomp his soul had loved, Paul, after hardly

more than four years reign, was buried in the Cathedral of the Fortress ; but his memory was not so easily laid aside, and his influence seemed to remain behind like some malevolent spectre of evil. The shadow of his father's murder, of his own part in the conspiracy, haunted and warped the spirit of his son ; while the terror of his despotic tyranny lived on in his creature Arakcheieff, who gained complete mastery over Alexander, and ruled Russia with iron, unsparing pitilessness. Nicholas, who succeeded his brother, was an even greater autocrat—the revolt of Pestel was suppressed with cruel severity.

“ God is too high and the Czar too far,” the people said wistfully ; but for the first time in Russian history the word “ Nihilist ” was heard. Though Alexander II. freed the serfs, and tried to bring in more liberal ideas, it was he who fell a victim to an assassin's bomb in 1881.

Always, beneath the surface of laws and civilisation, the elements of disorder, the old Eastern spirit seethed and smouldered. The heritage of wild, half-savage tribes of the steppes, the never forgotten influence of Tartar invasions, of wars and strife and an Oriental fatalism and disregard for life. Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Paul—those three figures seem to stand out in the history of modern Russia ; the Russia not of Kiev or of Moscow, but of Petersburg with its Western influence, its glamour of Court and Society, literature and music ; and yet they could not, either by their greatness or their tyranny, give Russia a new soul : all they could do was to make new laws, build their palaces and schools, and leave behind them memories that seemed still vividly alive.

The memories of Peter : the pink and white Palace on the Gulf of Finland ; the grim, brown Fortress ; the little house by the Neva, built by the Tsar's own hands in 1703, with its

simple rooms, its chapel and wonder-working image ; and not far off the wooden Cathedral of the Trinity—here always the spirit of the Great Reformer seemed to linger, here were the golden ikons before which he came to pray, and here was the place where the murdered body of Alexis was laid and Peter looked down at his son with that frozen, granite face of his. Very well I remember my sorrow one summer morning in 1913 when, from the windows of the Embassy just across the river, I watched the fire that destroyed the Cathedral of the Trinity with its blue-painted domes, its great gilt doors, and jewelled images.

And the memories of Catherine : the Hermitage with its pictures that rivalled all other collections in the world—the great rooms with their countless treasures of jade and porphyry and malachite and agate. The Palace at Tsarskoe ; the Marble Palace facing the Embassy, built originally for Gregory Orloff, and where later Stanislas Poniatowsky came to die. The Embassy itself built for the Soltikoffs. The Tauride Palace of the great Potemkin which became the Duma ; the Smolny Institute which became the Soviet.

And then the memories of Paul : Pavlosk, where his happiest days were spent ; Gatchina, already impregnated with the gloom of his growing fanaticism ; the Michael Palace, sombre and impressive with its great arch, its octagonal court, the vastness of its marble staircase. In 1882 it was fitted up as an Engineering Academy, and in November, 1917, when the boys of the cadet school made their vain and desperate effort to oust the Bolsheviks, some of them entrenched themselves here, determined to fight till the last. Across the Champ de Mars, cannons were trained on the mad Emperor's Palace, but, seeing that resistance was hopeless, the cadets surrendered ; and the rose-red walls still stood intact, with the golden spire of the Palace church

flashing in the sunshine, the last day I walked in the Summer Gardens and looked up at the windows, where so often I had seemed to see the small, ugly face of the man who had tyrannised Russia looking out at the new world.

The yellow trams that shriek and scream down the Sadovaia, the motors that hoot and whistle and jolt across the wooden bridge over the Fontanka, the troops of laughing children with their nurses in the Summer Gardens, the hunch-backed newspaper seller who sits at the gates, long lines of carts with stumbling horses, officers in long grey overcoats, women in costly furs, an old peasant with a shawl over her head. The shifting scenes pass, swept away by the war and the Revolution; but again on that last day when I looked up at the empty Palace I seemed to see the ghost-like face at the windows—and now the busy street was almost deserted, there were no motors, only an occasional battered tram, no officers in grey overcoats, no women in enveloping furs, no laughing children in the deserted Summer Gardens where the statues shivered in the frozen silence.

Change—evolution—unending tragedy. The scarlet flag of Liberty and Communism flying from the Fortress where the bodies of dead Emperors lie. Here in the Cathedral the marble coffin of Paul was always lit up with a halo of golden light from hundreds of flickering candles; and I remember being told that if one had a wish one had but to go and pray at the grave of Paul to have it fulfilled, as he had died an evil death, and, to give his spirit rest, it had been granted this special privilege. I think that once, for something I thought I wanted very much, I also went and put a little, flickering, yellow candle before that coffin with its golden eagles, but my wish was never fulfilled, and the silence of the big church with its sleeping Emperors seemed to mock me for my credulity.

Small, insignificant, ugly, in no ways great, among those other ghosts of dead men and women who wore the Crown of Russia, and each one, in his or her way, influenced her destiny, Paul's figure stands out with sinister prominence, even as in the shadows of the cathedral his coffin, lit up by the flickering candles, stood out from the other coffins, not for the good he did his country, but for the evil, and for the grim ghastliness of his ending.

CHAPTER VIII

KIEV—THE MOTHER OF RUSSIAN CITIES

OF Kiev, personally I can unfortunately remember very little, as we stayed there just one day on our way back from the Crimea in 1916, and all that has remained in my mind is a confused jumble which refuses to be sorted out and put into proper order.

I remember driving for miles up and down the steep hills, through busy crowded streets, visiting countless churches, both ancient and modern. I have a dim recollection left in my mind of the large terrace in front of the Palace with its view over the wide, yellow Dnieper, and the limitless mystery of the great plains. I have a vague picture, too, of the hotel bedroom with an enormous wooden bed, hideous carpets, heavy plush curtains, and a family of mice who did not seem in the least to resent my presence.

Amidst all the disjointed, desultory fragments one or two things stand out with vivid clearness. The ruins of the Golden Gate ; the church built by Rastrelli in 1774 on the high hill where it was said that St. Andrew planted a cross, and, turning to the disciples, who had accompanied him on his long journey to Russia, said, stretching out his arm : “ Here will one day be a city of great splendour, with many churches built to the glory of God.” The faces of the pilgrims in the Lavra, or Monastery of the Caves, founded by the monk Hilarion in the eleventh century ; old peasants

come from some far-away village where civilisation was still unknown ; women in strange, bright-coloured dresses ; monks with the mystic, dreaming faces of painted ikons ; children with big, wondering eyes !

Resting on the steps, standing in silent groups, kneeling before some jewelled image, one looked at them as one might have looked at the age-old stones themselves ; they were the old Russia—the Russia of still untold secrets, the Russia Western progress could not change. They had come hundreds of miles across the endless steppes, believing that their long pilgrimage would help them, cure them of some secret disease, bring their men safely back from the distant fighting line, give them a good harvest, riches, prosperity, happiness ! They knew nothing of the woes of Belgium, France, and England ; very little of the cause of the war ; but they thought St. Olga, or St. Vladimir, might help them ; that here in the Uspensky Cathedral, built in 1089, destroyed by the Tartars, rebuilt in the fifteenth century, destroyed once more by fire, and again rebuilt, their prayers might be answered. Further on, too, were the Catacombs of St. Anthony, who succeeded the monk Hilarion, and here seventy-three saints were laid to rest, among others John the Longsuffering, who had himself buried in the ground up to the neck and lived thus for thirty years. Surely so holy a man would help the suffering children of Russia !

The great Cathedral of St. Sophia, with its fifteen glittering domes, was full of them, too. The golden glimmer of old mosaics seemed to fill all the church with a dim radiance ; the faded frescoes ; the kneeling figures in the bright, barbaric colours ; the blue, drifting clouds of incense—one caught one's breath because it was all so far away from the world of reality, of bustling streets and clattering motors, the noise and clamour and rush of modern life. Here were



THE WINTER PALACE, PETERSBURG.



ARCHWAY FACING THE WINTER PALACE, PETERSBURG.

peace and faith and belief in miracles, the hush of old memories, the still unexplained mystery of the Indestructible Wall with the figure of the Virgin which no Tartar fire could burn. And it was again the old Russia of legend and history and romance, of cruel brutality, of colour, and mysticism.

The ghosts of long-dead princes, whose names still lived in the peoples' hearts, seemed to kneel amongst the living; and outside the iron doors the world of the twentieth century was no more. The white walls of Kiev still stood untouched with their golden turrets and domes; the Palace of the Princes could still be reached by the winding turret staircase from the south arcade; the old warriors of Vladimir moved in the shifting shadows; the daughters of Yaroslav smiled through the haze of dust and incense. Then the thunder of approaching millions, the shrill cry of Tartars, the roof of the great church, crowded with refugees and defenders, crashing down amidst smoke and flame, the cries of anguish, the pitiless laughter of Batu's soldiers!

Grandeur and pomp, desolation and war. The shimmer of jewels, the angry clash of arms! The memory of Mongol supremacy, of Asiatic tyranny indelibly impressed on the people—never to be forgotten or obliterated. The problem of Russia making hard-thinking, level-headed statesmen raise their shoulders in despair. The peril of Russia—the agony—the confusion! Who can understand it? Find a solution—a salvation? And yet over and over again was Kiev rebuilt from ashes, and those who have read of Russia's bondage under Tartar rule do not try to judge or explain her by European standards.

Nearly a thousand years before Peter began to build the new capital on the marshes, long even before the walls of the Kremlin at Moscow began to rise above the clustering

village, was Kiev called "The Mother of Russian Towns," founded even before that, so the legends says, by Ky and his two brothers in 430. In 862, Gastomyl, President of Novgorod, sent a message to the Varangians and asked their chieftain, Rurik of the family of Rus, who was, according to various historians, Varangian, Scandinavian, or Slavonic, to come and rule the broad rich lands where no order was. So Rurik came to Novgorod, and from there two of his warriors, Askold and Dir, sailed down the Dnieper on their way to Tsarigrad—as Constantinople was called in those days—meaning to enrol themselves in the guard of the Emperor of Byzance, but, passing by the fair city of Kiev on the hill, they straightway abandoned their journey, overcame the citizens, and made themselves masters of the town.

In 879, Rurik died at Novgorod, leaving a little son, Igor, for whom Oleg, his kinsman, became Regent, and to Oleg's ears was brought the fame of the city of Kiev, and, sailing down the Dnieper in his turn, he lured Askold and Dir by a crafty ruse aboard his ship. "You are not princes," he told them, standing above them immense and tall in his Viking helmet. "But I am of royal blood, and I have with me Igor, the son of Rurik." So Askold and Dir were killed without mercy, and the gates of Kiev were opened to the first Prince of the House of Rurik, and in the shifting shadows of that barbaric land, where wandering tribe fought against wandering tribe, dawned the first dim light of a great Empire.

It was in 907, the old chronicles say, that Oleg, with two thousand boats and eighty thousand men, sailed down the Dnieper and across the Black Sea to the golden city of Tsarigrad. In vain the Greeks tried to close the entry to the Straits with an iron chain, for Oleg had wheels attached to the bottom of his ships, and so sailed across dry land to the walls of the capital of Byzantium. With fire and sword

the wild hosts of the barbarians spread terror in the heart of the Emperor and his people, and finally the first Russian treaty known to history was made ; Oleg nailed his shield to the gate of Tsarigrad and returned to Kiev, laden with riches and treasures.

For thirty years Oleg reigned, subduing the wandering tribes of Slavs and Finns and Lithuanians, governing with a firm hand and great wisdom, and making Kiev the mother of all Russian cities. According to an old legend, a wizard warned him that his favourite horse would one day cause his death, whereupon Oleg dismounted, ordered that the horse be well cared for, but be no more brought out for him to ride. A few years later they came and told him that the horse was dead, and, in idle curiosity, Oleg went one day to the field where the bones lay already bleaching in the sun. " Look ! " said the great warrior. " How these wizards lie ! This was to be my death ! " and laughing carelessly, he set his foot upon the dead horse's head. But after all, the legend says, the wizards did not lie, for from the horse's skull a serpent darted out and bit Oleg in the leg, and from that wound he died.

Igor, the son of Rurik, married to Olga, who by some was said to be the daughter of Gastomyl, succeeded him, and reigned for thirty years ; but, in 945, was treacherously killed by the Drevlians. Sviatoslav, his son, was still too young to reign, so Olga became Regent in his name ; and she, who had been famous for her beauty, became now known for her inexorable spirit of revenge against the enemies who had slain her husband. So, when the Drevlians sent envoys to explain their unconsidered act, and to beg for her hand in marriage for their Prince, she apparently consented to all their proposals and said she would receive them publicly in front of all her people.

Unsuspecting, the envoys allowed themselves to be carried in their boats on the shoulders of Olga's men up to the gates of Kiev, but, arrived there, their bearers threw them into a deep pit that had been dug for the purpose, and buried them alive. Keeping silent over the fate of the first envoys, Olga sent for a guard of honour to conduct her to the city of the Drevlians, and, when they arrived, had them conducted to a bath-house, locked in and burnt. Then, pretending that she wished to pray on Igor's grave before she became the wife of another husband, she induced the still unsuspecting Drevlians to lead her there to a funeral feast, and erecting a tumulus over the slaughtered body of Igor, she made the Drevlians drink to his honour, till presently, when they were overcome with wine, her followers fell on them and murdered every one.

And still her thirst for vengeance was not satisfied; the people who had killed the man she loved had not yet suffered enough. Openly, with an armed host, she attacked the Drevlian stronghold, and, unable to overcome its defences, resorted once more to stratagem, and sent a message to the starving populace saying she would raise the siege, if they paid her tribute of a leash of pigeons and three sparrows from each homestead. Overjoyed by this clemency the people set to work to catch the birds and sent them to Olga; but when evening came, she had rags steeped in oil fastened to their wings and, setting them alight, sent the poor terrified birds fluttering back to their nests in the thatch, till presently the city of the Drevlians was ablaze behind its impregnable walls, and the inhabitants who tried to escape were massacred by the army who waited outside the gates. So, the legends say, did Olga avenge the death of her husband, and, satisfied at last, returned to Kiev, to rule with great wisdom in her son's name.

Famous she had been for her beauty, and her pitiless hate, but her name was to be handed down to history as Olga the Wise, or Olga the Sainted, and famous she was to be for her piety and devotion. It was said that Askold and Dir had both been made Christians, but Oleg and Igor worshipped Perun, the God of Thunder, and when Olga, journeying to Constantinople, was received into the Greek Church under the name of Helen, she could not induce her son Sviatoslav to become Christian. Battle and conquest were the only things that counted in his mind, and his picture still lives in Russian history, broad and strong, with a golden beard, one long lock of hair on his shaven head, blue eyes that were very fierce and bright, and a ring with two pearls and a blood-red ruby in his ear. Khazares, Viatices, Kazoques, Bulgarians and Greeks paid tribute to this mighty Prince, who sent them always this proud message: "I am marching against you!"—who never ate cooked meat; who, wrapped in his cloak, slept on the ground, the saddle of his horse for a pillow, and the wide night sky as a royal tent above him.

Soon after the death of his mother, Sviatoslav set out to the shores of the Danube to make war on the Bulgarians and Greeks, and, returning in triumph, sailed across the sea and tried to make his way up the Dnieper, but was attacked and killed by the Petchenigians, a warlike, nomad tribe of the Steppes who had just made their appearance, and who for many years were to threaten the peace and prosperity of Russian towns.

Sviatoslav left three sons, each born of a different mother, and among them he had divided his lands, giving Kiev to Yaropolk, the country of the Drevlians to Oleg, and Novgorod to Vladimir—the greatest and strongest of the three. Very soon after the death of their father,

dissension arose among the brothers : Oleg was killed in a battle against Yaropolk, Vladimir fled back to Novgorod, and for a time Yaropolk ruled with undisputed power.

But the warlike Vladimir did not rest for long, and beginning a new campaign against his brother, he sent to Rovgolod, Prince of Polotsk, and asked for his support and the hand of his daughter Rognyeda in marriage. But the Princess, dark-haired and golden-eyed, sent back her answer proudly : " I am betrothed to Yaropolk, Prince of Kiev, and never will I marry the son of a slave." It was true that Vladimir was the son of Malusha, one of Olga's serving maids, but when this reply was brought to him, he swore vengeance for the insult, and, attacking the castle of Rovgolod, he killed him and his two sons, and carried off Rognyeda as his unwilling bride. Then he made war on Yaropolk, laying siege to Kiev and Rodnya, till Yaropolk, betrayed by his adviser Blud, sought an interview to crave for peace, and was foully murdered even as he was about to enter his brother's tent.

Nestor, in his chronicle, does not say whether Rognyeda wept at the death of her former lover. Did she come softly to where the mangled body of her husband's brother lay, and gently nurse the dead head against her breast ? Or, shut in her narrow room, did she lie overwhelmed by tears, the masses of her dark hair covering her shoulders ? Gorislava, the people called her, pitying her many sorrows, for " Gore " in old Slavonic means " woe." Rognyeda of the golden eyes, mother of Yaroslav the Great, and wife of Vladimir !

Once, tortured beyond endurance by her bitter memories and by her husband's neglect, she stole into his room, meaning to kill him as he lay asleep. But, waking, he caught her with a dagger in her hand, and, in order to punish her for

her treachery, he ordered her to deck herself in her wedding-gown and all her jewels, and, lying on a couch, to wait for him to come and kill her. And Rognyeda did all he told her ; but when her husband came into her room, his bared sword in his hand, Isiaslav, one of his sons, met him. “ Dost thou want to live alone ? ” fearlessly the child faced his formidable father. “ Take then this sword and kill me. I do not wish to be witness of my mother’s death.” And, for the sake of the boy, Vladimir pardoned Rognyeda, and gave to her a city which he named Isiaslavl.

Unbridled in his passions, great and terrible in his love for women was Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, and yet he was a wise ruler, a mighty warrior, and one who aggrandised and enriched his kingdom. Soon after his accession he saw that the people’s faith needed strengthening and that a new religion was necessary to hold his dominions together. Accordingly he determined to find the belief that was best suited for his country, and he received many foreign envoys, and, not satisfied with this, sent people of his own to the different lands to make still more enquiries.

The Mohammedans had told him that he might have seventy wives, but that he must not eat pork or drink any wine. The idea of being allowed so many wives was one that appealed to Vladimir, but wine, he said, was a necessary delight to the Russian people, and when his envoys returned from the lands of the Mohammedans and told him how they performed many foul deeds and prayed to God with their heads covered, the grand Prince set aside their faith.

The German Catholics had told him how they worshipped God and fasted, and confessed their sins, and his envoys reported to him how there was no beauty in their churches, but only sadness and gloom and much austerity, and to

Vladimir repentance and austerity were not at all congenial, so he decided not to adopt the Catholic belief. The Jews also sent their envoys to him, and told him how, for the sake of their religion, they had been cast out of their country, and forced to wander over the world, and Vladimir answered them sternly : “ If God loved you and your laws, He would not allow you to be exiled. We Russians do not wish to share the same fate, therefore we will have none of your religion.”

But to the teachings of the Greek priests Vladimir listened with silent attention, and when his envoys returned from Constantinople and told him of the splendour of the Greek churches and the beauty of the ceremonial, Vladimir pondered deeply. And having laid siege to the ancient Greek city of Chersonesus in the Crimea, which was delivered into his hands, he sent word to Basil and Constantine, joint Emperors of Byzance, that he wished to marry their sister Anna, and be received into the Greek Church. Reluctantly, and with a heavy heart, the Princess Anna sailed away from her beautiful city to marry Vladimir, the Little Red Sun as his people called him, mighty in his own country as the Emperor Charlemagne. And at Chersonesus—afterwards called Cherson—where the great brown cliffs dip down into the sea that is blue as blue flowers and precious stones, was Vladimir baptised in the Christian faith, and, taking his new wife with him, sailed up the Dnieper, back to Kiev.

And there by his orders the statues of the gods were hacked to pieces, and the great wooden figure of Perun, the God of Thunder, with his silver head and golden beard, was dragged through the streets of the city and flung into the river. And by their hundreds, every day the citizens of Kiev were baptised in the waters of the Dnieper, not gladly, but because it was the will of the Grand Prince—and the

will of the Grand Prince was law. He had said the old gods were deaf and useless, and dumbly the people believed him ; and as Kiev was the mother of Russian cities, so the other cities followed where she led, and gradually and easily the Christian faith was spread throughout all the land.

Greatly did Vladimir enrich the city of Kiev, and to his Court came warriors from far and near, so that round him grew up nearly all the legends of early Russia. Ian the Tanner was there, who overcame the giant Petchnigain in single-handed combat, and Rovgold, and Dobrinia, and Elia Murametz, the peasant hero, and many others. But at last, in 1015, the Little Red Sun of Russia died, and, having been often unfaithful to the golden-eyed Rognyeda, he left many sons, who fought among themselves so that his kingdom was given up to murder and bloodshed.

Yaroslav, one of Rognyeda's sons, was Prince of Novgorod, and had refused to pay tribute to his father who was on his way to punish him for his disobedience when death overtook him. For as long as they could, his followers kept the fact that the Grand Prince had died a secret, for Sviatopolk the Accursed was in Kiev and they feared him greatly. Sviatopolk was the son of the beautiful Greek nun who had been slave to Yaropolk when Vladimir wrested his kingdom from him and made his slave his mistress. Therefore was Sviatopolk the Accursed called the son of two fathers, for none knew whose child he was.

All too soon the report of Vladimir's death reached his ears, and, seizing the power, he treacherously murdered his brothers Boris and Gleb and Sviatoslav and made himself master of Kiev. But Yaroslav of Novgorod, being warned by his sister Predslava that his father was dead, marched against the city, and overcame Sviatopolk and his army of Petchnigains, who, seeking to retreat across the barely-frozen

Dnieper, were caught and drowned by the breaking ice that could not bear their weight. The Petchnigains having failed him, Sviatopolk called to his aid Bolislas of Poland, but again Yaroslav defeated him, and Sviatopolk the Accursed fled across the plains, ever pursued by phantom enemies who would not let him rest, so that at last in misery he died.

And now was Yaroslav the lame, surnamed the Law-giver, sometimes called the Great, Prince of Kiev, and during his reign of thirty-eight years the mother of all Russian cities reached the zenith of her triumphant, evanescent glory. It was he who surrounded her with the white walls, with golden gates and turrets and domes that flashed in the sunshine. It was he who built the Cathedral of St. Sophia to commemorate a great victory over the Petchnigains, and it was he who framed the first laws of the country—the '*Russkaia Pravda*,' known as the Russian Right. He founded cities and schools, and concluded treaties with the sovereigns of Europe. He paid students to translate the the old Greek writings into the Slavonic language, and he enriched his churches and palaces with many treasures.

His wife was the Princess Ingigord of Sweden, and by her he had many children. Elisabeth, his eldest daughter, was loved by Harold Hadrada, the King of Norway, who for her sake scorned the advances of Zœe, the beautiful Empress of Bysanze, fought against the infidels in Sicily, and visited the Tomb of Our Saviour in Jerusalem. Finally, after many years of waiting, Elisabeth consented to marry him, and accompanied him when he fought against Harold, King of England, and was killed at Stamford Bridge.

A second daughter married Andrew, King of Hungary; a third, the Princess Anna, went to France as the bride of King Henry II. It was she who carried with her in memory

of her native land the "Evangelië" which was treasured after her death in the Cathedral of Rheims, the priests not knowing in what language it was written till, many hundred years later, Peter the Great came to France, and was shown the ancient missal as a curiosity, and opening it exclaimed, "It is written in my old Slavonic." So long had the book lain with none to understand the sonorous words that, touched by the hands of Peter of Russia, the old worn pages must surely have sighed for the memory of that fair princess whose fingers had turned them so often.

Yaroslav, too, left many sons, amongst whom he divided his kingdom, bidding them keep peace and obey Isiaslav, whom he made Prince of Kiev. Vain injunction, alas, for no sooner was the Grand Prince dead, and laid to rest in the blue and white marble coffin in the Cathedral of St. Sophia, than dissensions and quarrels broke out amongst the brothers, and for the next fifty or sixty years the principality of Kiev was the centre of bloodshed, murder and plunder. Brother fought against brother, cousin against cousin, nephew against uncle, and Vseslav of Polotsk, grandson of Yaroslav's elder brother, harassed his cousins with fire and sword. So swift was he in his movements, so suddenly did he appear, so miraculous were his escapes, that he was known as the Wizard, and was believed to change himself into a grey wolf flying across the steppes.

And at the same time the Polovtzi, that barbarous race of Turco origin, made their first appearance in Russia, burning and destroying cities and churches, sparing neither woman nor child, coming even as far as the walls of Kiev.

In 1113, Vladimir Monomachus, son of Vsevolod who had married a daughter of Constantine Monomachus, Emperor of Byzance, was chosen prince by the people's wish, and for a short space it seemed as if the glory of Kiev would once

more be renewed. Vladimir was famous for his successful wars against the Polovtzii, as well as for his wisdom and just government, his great strength and courage. But in spite of the prudent and discerning testament he left to his sons, chaos and disorder unutterable broke out amongst them after his death while they fought each other for the supremacy, and Poles, Lithuanians, Hungarians and Polovtzii harassed the country.

The expedition of Igor, Prince of Seversk, against the latter, handed down through the centuries, forms one of the most famous legends of those times, embodying all the poetry and picturesque language that is still to be found in the uneducated peasants and soldiers.

Sviatoslav, then Prince of Kiev, had fought a great army of the Polovtzii near the Orel and the Dnieper, but Igor said to his warriors : " The Princes have beaten the Polovtzii on their own land, but you and I will go where they dare not go, across the Don, into the wild steppes and crush them utterly. . . . Yearning filled the soul of the Prince, and his consuming wish to see the broad blue Don made him forget many evil tokens." So, with his young son and his brother, Vsevolod, the Rushing Bull, in his great golden helmet, Igor set out across the plain. And Vsevolod told his brother of the strength and valour of the fighting men he had with him. " They saw the light of day to the sound of blowing trumpets, and during their early youth they were nourished with meat given them at the end of spears. They know the distant roads and the great precipices. Their bows are bent and their quivers are full, their swords sharpened. They sweep into the fields like grey wolves famished for carnage, they burn to crown their Prince's forehead with a wreath of laurels. . . ."

And Igor set foot in his golden stirrup and rode out to

meet the enemy. Terrible storms arose, driving across the steppes ; flocks of birds of prey hovered over the hosts of warriors, wild beasts howled in their hidden lairs, the foxes barked at the shining blueshields ; the spirit of Evil shrieked out its warning from the sea coast to the Volga, to Khorsun and the " Idol of Tmoutorakan." And in a fierce battle were the Polovtzii overcome, great treasures of gold and silk and fur fell into the hands of the Russians, while Igor kept for himself a crimson banner on a silver lance.

But soon from the South came pouring new hordes of Barbarians and surrounded the Russian army. A cloud of arrows rained on Igor's warriors, in vain Vsevolod, the Rushing Bull, attacked the oncoming hordes, his golden helmet glittering in the storm light, his blows falling heavily on the Polovtzii warriors. For two days and nights the battle continued, but, " with the red dawn of the third morning the Russian banners fell before the enemy, and, having no more blood to shed, the Russian Generals died for their country." Igor in truth went across the Blue Don, but he went as a captive in chains and not as a conqueror.

Bitterly in Poutiole wept the wife of Igor when she heard of his fate ; looking out across the plains from the walls of the city she stretched out her arms to the far horizon and wept. " Oh, cruel wind, why did you lend your wings to the arrows of the enemy let loose on the warriors of my love ? Oh, majestic Dnieper, you have carried on your breast the ships of Sviatoslav to the camp of Kobiak ; give back to me the loved one of his country and of my heart, and no more in the early mornings will I pray the sea to take him my tears."

For the space of many months was Igor kept a prisoner in the camp of the Polovtzii ; but Laavar, one of his guards, grew to love him, and one night—when the Polovtzii, having

drunk their rum, grew merry—Igor, making the sign of the Cross, crept out of his tent and down to the river, where Laavar waited for him with two swift horses. So Igor rode back across the steppes and, embarking on the Donetz, reached his native land and returned thanks for his deliverance in the Cathedral of Kiev.

But the splendour of the mother of Russian cities had vanished. Prince succeeded Prince, murder and carnage swept down the narrow streets, the spirits of betrayal and assassination haunted the Palaces; the voices of those who prayed in the churches were broken by sobs. The glory and prosperity of the days of Oleg, of Vladimir and Yaroslav were no more; and, formidable and sinister, the name of a people hitherto unknown in history sprang into sudden and dire significance. Driving the Polovtzi and other Nomad tribes before them, the terrible Tartar hordes swept across the plains, overwhelming and invincible in their numbers, burning, slaying, plundering as they came.

In 1224 the Russian Princes, collecting a great army, tried to check the advance of the Asiatic barbarians and were defeated by the river Kalka, near the town of Maruipol. But instead of continuing their pursuit of the flying armies further than the shores of the Dnieper, the Tartars turned back once more to the East, and Russia might have believed herself spared had not signs and presages of evil continued to warn the people of dire calamity. The plague burst out in various places. A terrible fire nearly destroyed Novgorod. The earth trembled and shook; the sun was darkened. There were famines and drought and plagues of locusts.

Then, in 1237, the Mongol hosts again advanced. Riazan, Moscow, Vladimir went down before them, burnt and ruined; and in 1240 Batu, the great Tartar chief, looking out from the smoking ruins of Chernigoff, saw the distant white walls

of Kiev, his wild, savage heart full of the lust of ruin and destruction. Waiting till the Dnieper was frozen, he moved across the solid ice with his hosts of horsemen and waggons, and camels, and the snow-covered country was black with the swarming figures of the Asiatic warriors.

Shock upon shock their battering rams thundered on the golden gates, the stones hurled by their engines crashed on the walls ; driven back again and again they seemed to spring up once more in unbelievable numbers, till at last the gates crumbled, and they held the ramparts. But still, desperately, heroically, the people of Kiev fought on, men, women and children piling up a new wall, only to be swept away and annihilated. Then, seeking refuge on the roofs of churches, they flung stones and missiles at the black horde sweeping up the narrow streets, butchering and killing as they came, till the roof of St. Sophia, crowded thus to overflowing, fell in, burying its defenders in its downfall.

Devastating everything they came across ; burning, plundering, murdering men, women and children ; the Tartars left the Mother of Russian cities a heap of smoking ruins, with just the tottering wall of St. Sophia, with the image of the Virgin, that neither fire nor shock of arms had been able to destroy, standing up amidst the waste.

The birds of prey gathered in a dark cloud over the masses of the dead, and silence fell softly over the blood-stained trampled snow. The creaking of the wheels of Tartar carts, the fierce war cry of the little, yellow-faced soldiers ; the neighing of horses, the thunder of battle, all hushed now in the frozen stillness ; the desolation of a city of crumbling ruins, still smouldering in faint blue smoke, and that one wall left standing with the pitying Mother of God looking down on her fallen churches.

And now for many years were the Princes of Russia

tributary vassals of the great Tartar Khan, and darkness and sorrow lay over the wide lands and ruined cities. A darkness that has left its mark indelibly impressed on the country, a sorrow that has never been forgotten, a certain Oriental sombreness and fatalism nothing can obliterate. A shadow of dread, of resistless submission, and the fierceness of a pitiless cruelty. Only one name shines out like a star in the history of those days, the name of Alexander, Prince of Novgorod; blue-eyed and fair, a giant in stature, a great man and a hero, named by the church St. Alexander Nevsky, of whom Batu said, "I have never seen a Prince like him."

In 1240, when the Mongols were first attacking Kiev, Alexander, then barely twenty-one, fought and overcame the Swedes who were sailing up the Neva. In 1241 he freed Pskoff from the German Knights in the famous battle that has been named the Ice Slaughter. And seven times he fought and crushed the Lithuanian bands sent out against him. When his father, Yaroslav, Prince of Kiev, died in Mongolia, where he had gone to pay homage to the Tartar Khan, Batu sent a message to Alexander commanding him to come and take his father's place; and, having asked spiritual advice of Cyril, Bishop of Rostoff, Alexander went to Sarai, and from there was sent on to the Grand Khan in his distant Eastern fastness.

So, with his brother Andrei, along that weary way across the endless plains, rode young Alexander, with his head bent, thinking of his father and the fate that perhaps awaited him at the Tartar horde. But, admiring his calm, quiet fearlessness, his high bearing and great stature, the Khan treated him with honour, did not require him to give up his religion, and made him Lord of Kiev and later on of Vladimir.

The Tartar yoke weighed ever more heavily on Russia.

The exorbitant taxes, the registering of each man's head, of every horn and hoof of his cattle; the interest demanded for all arrears of payment, were all slowly ruining the people, and if they were unable to pay they were tortured, imprisoned, sold into slavery. Looking out over his suffering country, Alexander's eyes darkened with overwhelming sadness, his young face grew thin and hard and stern with the dumb anguish that tore his heart. His journeys to the Tartar horde had shown him the terrible odds there were against Russia; his clear, far-seeing judgment knew that to attempt to resist or fight the Tartars would only mean endless carnage, the destruction of cities, the burning of churches, the massacre of women and children, war and desolation unspeakable.

Again and again in Novgorod and Pskoff the people tried to revolt; his brother, even his own son, refused to listen to his advice of patience and endurance, only to be punished cruelly for their folly. Again and again in order to placate the Tartars he journeyed to Sarai where Batu, who had loved the beautiful young prince, was dead, and had been succeeded by Berkai, stern and inflexible and hard to convince. Times without number, too, he went the long, weary journey to the capital of the great Khan in Asia, till at last, worn out by his constant anxieties and endless wanderings, his strength gave way, and falling ill on his way home from Sarai in 1263, he took the monk's habit at Sarrodets and died.

A breathless messenger brought the news to Cyril, Metropolitan of Vladimir, when he was officiating in the Cathedral, and, turning to the crowd in the shadowed church, the old man raised his trembling hands amidst the clouds of blue incense. "Alas, my children!" he cried, "the sun of the Russian land has set."

Amidst the tears and mourning of a sorrowing people, the body of the Prince was brought to Vladimir and laid to rest ; and many years later, when Peter the Great wished to establish his new capital, and could not persuade his subjects to live in a city where there were no saints, he had the body brought to Petersburg and laid in the great new Church of Alexander Nevsky, on the spot where the young Prince, brave and sunny-eyed and unafraid, had conquered and overcome the Swedish hosts.

Canonised by the Russian Church, the name of Alexander has lived through the centuries. Had it not been for his wise advice, his foreseeing prudence, the Russians, vainly revolting against the Tartar oppression, might have been utterly annihilated. Mongol Princes would have ruled at Kiev, and Moscow and Novgorod ; the language, the religion, the whole race of the Russian people, might in time have disappeared ; and, masters of all that vast rich land, who knows to what heights the savage Tartar hordes might have risen, who can tell how far their power might have extended ?

A few desultory attempts had been made to rebuild Kiev but, with her crumbling walls, her ruined palaces and churches ; she was little more than an outpost, till Olgerd, son of Godimir, Prince of Lithuania, seized on all the country round. Called by some the "Greatest Statesman of the Middle Ages," he increased his power till his name was feared by the German knights, by the Princes of Novgorod and Moscow cowering behind their walls, by the wild Tartar bands sweeping across the plain. His son Jaquello embraced the Catholic religion in order to marry the beautiful Jadwiga, Queen of Poland, building up thus the Polish-Lithuanian kingdom which for many years was to be Russia's most bitter enemy.

Meanwhile, the power of the Tartars was beginning to weaken. Revolutions, dissensions and civil wars had broken out in the horde—enfeebling the armies, and dispersing the forces in various directions—so that Ivan III., Prince of Moscow, gained a great victory over them, lifting thus the yoke of Tartar supremacy from Russia.

Peace, however, was not to come easily to Kiev. There was the constant controversy of religion. Orthodox and Catholic Priests preaching their varying doctrines ; there was the enmity of the Princes of Moscow ; there were the attacks of Crim Tartars, who in 1483 burnt her once more to the ground ; there were the incursions of German knights into her territory, and the fierce raids of Cossack bands. Swept by wars and insurrections, by peasant revolts, by brutal massacres, the country lay tormented and suffering.

Now and then such names as Bogdan Chmielnicki or Mazeppa blaze out for a few moments amidst the welter of killing, the tramp of bloodthirsty crowds on the country roads, the thundering hoofs of Polish or Cossack horsemen. Then at last the Treaties were signed that gave the Ukraine definitely back to Russia. Elisabeth and Catherine came to Kiev with all their Court ; prosperity and commerce flourished once more, the bells of the churches rang out to the silence of the fields where peasants ploughed the rich black earth.

In 1911 a tragedy and a crime brought the name of the old capital of Russia once more into prominence, when Stolypin, the Great Prime Minister of the Emperor Nicholas II., was assassinated in the Opera House. I well remember the horror that fell on Petersburg when the news was first made public ; the feeling one had of sudden emptiness, of a ship that, rudderless, seemed to be drifting with the tide. Already some ten years earlier an attempt had been made to kill the Prime Minister at his country house out on the

Islands, and passing it, I had seen the balcony shattered by the assassin's bomb. It was here that his daughter was so cruelly injured, and from here that she was carried to the Winter Palace, while the agony of mind which wracked her father, for whose sake she was suffering, was more intense even than the torture she endured.

Ever since then Monsieur Stolypin had been guarded with the most intense precautions, spending his summers on the Island of Yelagin in the big white Palace which had been built by Alexander I. for his mother. When one drove out on the Islands, one found all the roads leading to Yelagin blocked with barbed wire and patrolled with police, while little boats with other armed policemen circled round the grounds on the water.

An immensely tall man with a square, black beard, and eyes that for all their keenness were those of a dreamer, Monsieur Stolypin was a true patriot ; he believed in firmness, and put the welfare of his country before everything ; even before the danger that pursued him so relentlessly, and which he knew would one day strike him down. He was buried near the Cathedral of the Assumption, in that old capital of Russia where so much of her history had been written ; those who knew the truth of his work mourned him with aching hearts, while those who blindly had seen in him only a tyrant, jubilated, not knowing that by killing him they had piled up one more stone of their country's ruin.

And ever since the Revolution Kiev has been once more the centre of turmoil and unrest. There was already during the Government of Kerensky an idea of giving Autonomy to the Ukraine ; then came the Bolshevik rising, the streets of Kiev running red with blood. The rise of the Mazeppa party, Petloura with his followers fighting in turn both the

White Armies and the Bolsheviks; finally driven out by them, having to seek refuge in Poland.

Ukraine—the land of grain, of rich black soil and flowering cherry-trees, the land of the old Rurik Princes, fought for by Russians and Poles and Lithuanians; the country of romance, and legends, and storms—Ukraine, that name whose true meaning is border, or frontier, or beyond! And Kiev, that old Mother of Russian Cities on the hills above the yellow Dnieper, with her palaces and churches, and the Virgin on her Indestructible Wall looking down with pitiful, wistful eyes on the sorrows of her people.

CHAPTER IX

MOSCOW—IVAN THE TERRIBLE

It happens just occasionally that one has a vision of something that brings a sudden mist of tears to one's eyes and makes one's heart seem to catch in one's throat. Perhaps it is a church, a beautiful view, a picture, a jewel, or merely a bunch of flowers, and why it should affect one it is impossible to explain. Very probably it isn't at all the most wonderful thing one has seen, and yet, just for a second, time and the world seem to stand still, and one is conscious only of beauty ; beauty as a thing concrete, and real, and tangible. So, I remember, with vivid clearness, my first view of the Kremlin at Moscow.

It was, I think, in the winter of 1912 that we went there for a short visit. We arrived very early in the morning, and of the drive from the station I remember practically nothing. It was still quite dark, our carriage bumped over ill-paved streets ; one had dim glimpses of big houses with here and there a lighted window, of flickering lamps at street corners ; of passing people wrapped in huge fur coats, of moujiks sweeping the newly fallen snow ; of queer little sledges and cabs, narrower, higher, more tumble-down even than the ones in Petersburg ; of electric trams with thickly frosted windows ; of open wooden booths ; of the huge, looming shadows of churches.

Then came the arrival at the hotel, the warm, brightly-

lit hall, the smell that is so inseparable to Russian houses of cabbage soup and sunflower oil. The bowing manager ; moujiks in bright coloured shirts carrying up our boxes ; a porter in a dark blue belted tunic and a queer little cap, trimmed with peacock feathers ; the dim, subdued hum of waking life, against the windows the greyness of the slowly dawning winter's day. And, then, something that grew out of the mists ! I had only carelessly—busy with my unpacking—looked up at the unshuttered windows, but I remember that after that one glance I stood still ; everything else forgotten, the modern, ugly hotel bedroom sinking away, the walls just crumbling into dust, leaving me alone, facing immensity. Very slowly it was growing light, a faint pink flush was stealing across the greyness of the sky, a blue mist still lay over the snow-covered street, veiling the opposite houses, and beyond them, making them shrink into insignificance, rose a great shadow. Was it a fairy-tale castle seen in childish dreams, or a stupendous bit of scenery from some Russian Ballet, or Wagner Opera ?

I had, of course, read about the Kremlin, pictured it to myself rather hazily, not paid really much attention ; but that first sight of the great red walls, with one of the nineteen turrets, against the frosty, slowly brightening sky was one that I have never forgotten, one that has remained with me always, and that not all the crowding impressions of the following days could equal or obliterate.

Moscow ! The Heart of Russia. Little Mother Moscow ! The walls of the Kremlin against which Tartars, Lithuanians, Poles and French have thundered ! Destroyed over and over again by fire, swept by plague and famine and pestilence, and yet, even as Kiev, rising again and again from her ruins, replacing that old Mother of Russian Cities in the hearts of her children. Moscow of the many hundred

churches, of the golden bells, of the countless, crowding memories.

They say that in the twelfth century the hill above the river Moskva was covered by a thick forest, occupied by the small estate of the farmer Stephen Kutchko, with near by a little wooden church called *Spass na Boru* or Church of the Redeemer in the Wood. In the year 1147 Yuri Dolgorouki—George the Long Armed—one of the sons of Vladimir Monomachus, Prince of Kiev, came to meet his cousins Sviatoslav and Oleg of Novgorod by the Moskva river, and built a fortified wall round the farm of Stephen Kutchko whom he summarily turned out. Legend says that Yuri had British blood in his veins, for his father is supposed to have married Gyda, the daughter of Harold, King of England ; and perhaps it was that strain of practical, British commonsense which made Yuri see how useful the river Moskva would be for traffic and commerce, and so made him doggedly persist in enlarging the fortified village on the hill.

Then, in 1237, came Batu with his Tartars, destroying everything in his path, marching on to Kiev, leaving only smoking ruins behind him. And with the quiet, persevering patience and resignation so characteristic of the Russian people the little wooden town was built up again, prospering and thriving even under the heavy Tartar rule. Ivan Kalita built the first wooden Cathedral of the Assumption in 1326 for the Metropolitan Peter, persuading him to leave the city of Vladimir and take up his quarters at Moscow. A little later the wall of oak was destroyed by fire, and the Russians, so essentially a nation of carpenters, built a wall of white stone round the Kremlin, hoping thus to save it from the attack of Tartar hordes ; but in 1382 Moscow was betrayed into the hands of Tokthamish, the great general of Timur the Lane, and Demitri Donskoi, the victor of Kulikovo,



THE NEVA—SPRING.



THE NEVA—WINTER.



returned from Kostroma to find his capital reduced to ashes.

Once again, in 1395, the newly built walls were threatened by the Tartars, but this time the Image of the Virgin, said to have been painted by St. Luke, was brought from Vladimir to Moscow, and by a miracle, as it seemed, Timur and his hosts turned back.

But at last under the reign of Ivan III., in 1485, the Tartar supremacy was definitely overthrown, and the present walls of the Kremlin were built, painted white in those days with green-roofed turrets and towers, shining across the plains, enclosing the old wooden Palaces, and those new churches of stone, which Italian architects were teaching the Russians to build. The Uspenski Sabor, or Cathedral of the Assumption, the Archangel Cathedral, the Cathedral of the Annunciation (with its nine golden domes), the Church of the Redeemer in the Forest, rebuilt and glorified, with its chapels dedicated to the Saints Yuri, Samon and Aviva, who are the special Patrons of love affairs.

We were in Moscow only four or at the most five days that year of 1912, days filled with colour, splendour and unforgettable radiance. It was the first afternoon, I think, that we drove under the Iberian Gate, by the sacred Chapel of the Iberian Virgin with its wonder-working Image, and up into the Red Square that is nine hundred yards long and a hundred and seventy-five yards broad, bounded on one side by the walls of the Kremlin and on the other by the so-called Trading Rows. All around one the white silence of the snow, golden domes half frosted over, turrets and battlements, towers and high gateways mingled in a strange mixture of Russian, Byzantine, Gothic and Italian architectures.

One could describe every detail minutely and yet find it impossible to explain the nameless charm of it all ; the space, the colouring, the mystic radiance that is over everything.

It has not quite the well-known Eastern magic, and yet it has nothing of the West. The golden ruins of Rome, the stately splendour of Versailles, the Louvre or Notre Dame, the beauty of Westminster Abbey, the picturesque solemn majesty of the Tower of London—it is unlike all of these. Wonderful they are, all of them, some of them more ancient, with memories just as full of history and romance and tragedy—and yet for none of them can I recapture the thrill I had when I first stood on the Red Square and looked up at the walls of the Kremlin; at the golden domes, the turrets and towers, and at the end of the Square the Cathedral of St. Basil!

Of all the churches of Moscow, that city of beautiful churches, this surely is the weirdest and most arresting. A good many books dismiss it carelessly as merely curious and odd; Americans perhaps would say it was “cute”; some people even call it hideous; the French, during the occupation of Moscow, had so little respect for it as a church that they used it for stabling their horses. And yet, with its garish blues and greens and yellow, with its gold crosses glittering in the sunshine, with its towers and spires and domes all different shapes and forms, it is so arresting, so individual, that even those who call it grotesque and odious have to stop and look at it. If a building can express a personality then surely the Church of St. Basil is a reproduction almost of the man for whom it was built; terrible, monstrous, savage and brutal, and yet in a way almost great, almost a genius.

The snow crunched and screamed under my feet as I walked all round it, finding at every corner a new strange bit of architecture, so fantastic that it seemed it must be a misproportion, until one examined it closer and found it in perfect harmony. Not one of the windows was like another,

every tower and dome was shaped a different way, each one of the great bronze doors was separate and distinct. Beggars crouched on the steps, people came and went on the Red Square ; a sledge with two Cossack Officers with high fur caps came down from the Kremlin, under the great arch of the Spasski, or Redeemer Gate, with its miraculous Ikon, to which those who were about to die on the Square addressed their last prayers.

A group of peasants uncovered reverently as they passed under the gateway, two or three Tartars in round black caps stood by the Lobnoe Mest—or Place of the Skull—gazing up at the walls of the Kremlin.

The golden bells of Ivan Veliki broke the still, cold purity of the air, and the bells of St. Basil answered in a chorus of silver voices ; and standing at one of the doorways of the church I also looked up at the Kremlin walls, at the Tsarina's Tower with its queer shaped roof, at the Tower of Constantine and Helen, where the ancient torture chambers used to be, and the small Tower with its narrow windows from which it is said the terrible Tsar watched the executions on the Red Square.

Inside St. Basil one had still less the feeling of being in a church. The dark, narrow passages, the dim chapels with their painted walls, their fantastic discordance, the spiral staircases that led from one level to another ; here there was nothing to inspire reverence, one had rather the feeling of being watched all the time by something evil and sinister, something intensely unhappy, a spirit groping in torment, a soul tortured and torn by conflicting emotions. And dumbly the walls seemed still to echo with the bitter weeping of a man whose vision had been swallowed in darkness ; the man who built the church, whose sightless eyes yearned in vain to look on his accomplished dream, whose thin groping hands

perhaps strayed over the walls, trying to impress on his mind this work of his imagination he had never seen, while all the time the tears from those seared eyes of his ran down his trembling cheeks.

How had the vision of this church he was to build first come to him. One wonders that and can find no answer to one's question. Did it follow him persistently down the narrow, uneven, dirty streets? Or, sitting by the river, looking over the plain, did he see strange, weird shaped cupolas and domes rise out of the evening mists lying over the Sparrow Hills? Or, lying on some hard bed, above a stove, did he dream of twisting passages, of shadowy chapels, where from the roof the Saviour's face looked down in grave and pitying tenderness? And then, when he heard that the Tsar had said that he wanted a church that was to be like no other church to commemorate his victory over the Tartars at Khazan, did a gleam of light come to his haunted, visionary eyes, did his fingers move as if they traced the lines of some fantastic building?

A church that was to be like no other church! The Tsar Ivan, whom men have named the Terrible, had many churches in the walls of the Kremlin and in not one of them could he pray in peace. When he knelt in the huge vastness of the Uspenski Cathedral he was oppressed by the majestic grandeur of the Byzantine-Norman style; that made him feel small and mean in the insignificance of his mortal humanity, while always he seemed to hear in the silence the shriek of his Uncle Yuri Glinski, murdered by the mob in the Chapel of St. Demetrius. The Archangel Cathedral with those coffins, where beneath a velvet pall the bodies of dead Princes lay, where he also was to lie one day, filled him with haunted terror and dread. In the beautiful Cathedral of the Annunciation the air seemed heavy with prayers; up

among the shadows of the roof he fancied he could hear the rustling of angels' wings, as he heard them the day he married the sweet-faced Anastasia Romanovna Zakharin.

No, he wanted a church where he could be alone with his prayers, with that tortured conscience of his, with that mad, perverted, evil-infected mind. So presently he sent out word to the Italian and other foreign architects who were in the city, bidding them bring him plans, and one by one he sent them away again with cruel, biting words, and bitter sarcasm. Had he not said that he wanted something that had never been seen before? Why did they bring him drawings that were Gothic or Lombard or Greek? Was there not one man in his dominions who had imagination?

So at last the rumour of the Tsar's impatience and displeasure came to the ears of the man with the visionary eyes, and for days and nights he hardly slept or took food, till finally he had his plans complete and took them to the Kremlin. And, perhaps, when he saw those plans, the Tsar sat for a moment very still. A church that was to be like no other church in all the world—this little man who cringed and trembled and fawned had found the vision where all the others had failed. And he, the Prince of Moscow, the Tsar of Little Russia, of White Russia, the Lord of Khazan, of Vladimir, of Sousdal and of Novgorod, was to own it. For him alone would it be built, this church unrivalled, fantastic, unique, without compare! And when it was finished one would see to it that this little cringing fellow whose brain could conceive such a master-piece should never work again. Just this one church he should do, and nothing else; those exalted words of his, "This have I done, but this is nothing in comparison with what I can still do" should never be fulfilled, and never should he raise another edifice!

And so when at last the work was finished, before even

the last stone was laid, torturing, burning darkness descended on the man with the dreaming, visionary eyes ; for, by the order of the Tsar, he was seized and blinded, lest by any chance he be lured to make another masterpiece for perhaps another Tsar, that should in any way equal this church that was like no other church in all the world.

The rosy light of the setting sun turns the snow almost to the colour of blood ; behind the great Palace the sky is blazing, a faint, mauve mist steals up from the river, the great walls throw their purple shadows across the Square ; the high bell tower of Ivan Veliki, the battlements and turrets, the domes and cupolas stand out as if cut in dark blue cardboard against the vivid sky ; the bells of all the churches ring, and the citizens of Moscow cross themselves devoutly. The candles gutter over the tombs of dead Princes in the Archangel Cathedral. Michael of Tchernigoff, murdered by the Tartars, lies there, and Demitri Donskoi, who overcame their army at Kulikova, and Vassili the Darkened, whose eyes were put out, and Ivan the Great, cold and calculating and successful, and that other Ivan, surnamed the Terrible !

They say that when he was born rolling claps of thunder were heard all over Russia, while lightning blazed across the sky, heralding the birth of one who was to be eternally feared and hated, whose name was to be handed down to history as that of an inhuman monster, whose pitiless cruelty had neither sense nor reason. His father Vassili, had had no children by his first marriage, and had, in consequence, sent his wife into a Convent, and married the beautiful Helena Glinski, the daughter of a Lithuanian noble. In 1530 their first child Ivan was born, and three years later Vassili died. Then began the storms of that unhappy childhood that were to turn the blue-eyed baby into the crazy

brutal fanatic. A few years Helena reigned with her lover Telepnic Obolensky, aiding her ; then, still young and beautiful, she died, of poison many said, and so was Ivan left an orphan with the fierce Princes of Schouiski and Bielski fighting for the leading hand in the Government.

Finally the Shouiski remained alone and victorious, and, under their harsh rule, the little boy was taught to be cruel, was taken to see people crushed to death by heavy wagons ; was forced to witness executions, was encouraged to ill-treat animals, finding presently his chief pleasure in throwing cats and dogs over the high ramparts of the Kremlin walls ; was himself often left hungry and cold, insulted, beaten, neglected, threatened with torture.

And yet slowly, all the time, he was growing up. It was no longer the child with the shrinking eyes, but a boy, suddenly conscious of his own power, who turned with a swift, fierce movement in the middle of the assembled Court and bade his kennel men seize André Schouiski and throw him to the hounds. So abruptly, in horror, the reign of the Schouiskis was ended, and Ivan, though still under the tutelage of his mother's family, the Glinskis, was free of oppression, and in the reaction from that rule of terror, let his unbridled, turbulent wildness sway him entirely.

When he was eighteen he was crowned as the first Tsar of Russia, a title that had been used so far only unofficially by Ivan III. and Vassili, but that was henceforth accepted and recognised as the rightful rank of the Prince of Moscow ; and at the same time he chose for his bride the beautiful Anastasia Romanovna Zakharin, from whose family were to come the future Emperors of Russia.

Gone now were the days when the great Princes of Kiev were wedded to the daughters of foreign rulers. Ivan's offers to various Sovereigns had been curtly refused, so that

he had to have recourse to the custom of his fathers. Accordingly word was sent round, and hundreds of young girls of good family were brought to Moscow and lodged in a great building especially set apart for them, with large rooms, each containing twelve beds. Here at night the Tsar came with but one courtier ; went slowly through the dimly lit chambers and made his selection. So was Anastasia Romanovna chosen, and for a short time the Tsar, passionately in love with his young wife, gave himself up completely to adoration.

Then a few months later, came the two great fires of Moscow, following each other with but a short interval, the second one surpassing in violence anything ever seen. Seventeen hundred people were said to have lost their lives in the flames ; the Palace and all the wooden buildings in the Kremlin were destroyed, the maddened populace, believing that the Glinskis had started the fire, attacked the Kremlin, murdered Yuri Glinski in the Uspensky Cathedral, and clamoured to see Ivan, who had sought refuge in his Palace on the Sparrow Hills.

It was at this time that the Monk Silvester gained his great influence over the distracted monarch, aided by Adachev, sage and wise counsellor, and by Anastasia, sweet-faced, gentle and merciful ; so that between them, for a little while, Ivan, curbing his wildness, became a great ruler, governing with justice and astute policy, enriching his dominions, bringing in foreign trade and commerce, introducing the first printing press in Moscow. So, also, was the first National Assembly convened in the Red Square, with the young Tsar addressing the people ; then came the siege and capture of Khazan, the birth of Ivan's first son, the annexation of Astrakhan.

But Russia, hoping for peace and prosperity, was to be

disappointed. The Tsar fell ill, was believed to be dying, and, overhearing his counsellors discussing the succession, lost his faith in them, when he recovered grew to watch them with ever increasing suspicion. The good of their influence was to be still further undermined when, on a pilgrimage to distant shrines, he had an interview with the exiled Bishop of Kolumna. The evil counsel given by the wicked old man, strengthened by the fulfilment of the prophecy that his son would die, took seed in the great, half-crazy brain, growing like a disease, corrupting and polluting all that had been good.

The death of Anastasia in 1560 was the final blow; the removal of her gentle, restraining influence, the suspicion that her death had not been due to natural causes, seemed to break the last strand holding Ivan to reason. Adachev and Silvester were banished; urged on by the unscrupulous Maluta Skoutarov, the mad passion of the Tsar seemed to possess him like a raging spirit of evil; his lust for blood, his pitiless delight in human suffering, his brutal punishment of small, imagined offences made the Russians, cowering under the rule of terror, wonder whether they were governed by a man or a devil. Men were impaled, beaten to death, cut into small pieces, scalded in burning oil, tortured in ways only a monster can have devised. A cloud of horror and dark, unutterable despair lay over Moscow, while the people, praying in their churches, shivered and lifted beseeching hands to the tender-eyed Ikons, imploring protection, for none knew on whom the Tsar's anger might not descend.

But who could, then or now, understand the workings of that tormented, fury-driven mind, so perverted and trained to cruelty? Everywhere he looked there was blood. It had been indelibly stamped on his childish impressionable brain till everything seemed to swim in a red mist before his

eyes. He could not get away from it, and there was no Anastasia now to lay a cool hand on that throbbing, aching forehead, to dispel by gentle words the crowding, jostling figures of terror that pressed around his bed at night. His attempt to marry one of the sisters of the King of Poland had failed, and, smarting under the rebuff, he made a handsome dark-haired Circassian girl his wife. But stormy and passionate, her influence only dragged him further down, and ever more darkly sinister the figure of the terrible Tsar shadowed his country.

In the Kremlin Palace, rebuilt and redecorated after the fire, he would sit brooding, his brilliant, shifting eyes full of virulent, malignant thoughts. In the golden dusk of the great churches, prostrating himself on the ground till a bump grew on his forehead, he would pray to be forgiven, accusing himself loudly of his sins and crimes, humbling himself to the dust before his court and his people. Taking up his residence at the Alexandrov Slaboda, a village about eighty-six miles from Moscow, surrounded by the dreaded *Opritchnina*, his personal bodyguard, he at one moment played at religion in a priest's vestments, at another gave himself up to incredible debauchery, or watched with gloating eyes the torture of some helpless victim.

The old Palace at Alexandrov has disappeared now, built into the new monastery, only here and there an ancient door of the Cathedral, dark, underground passages, the ruins of a big outer building remain, with the haunting memories of hideous mysteries, of unspeakable atrocities, shadows no historian has yet penetrated.

Sombre, frightful, with matted hair, and wild blood-shot eyes, the face of Ivan stares at one out of the shifting mists; his bursts of demoniacal laughter seem to echo unceasingly in those few rooms left of the old Palace in the

Kremlin. In the churches one seems always to hear the moan of his self-accusing prayers. On the Red Staircase the rapping of his long, iron-pointed staff follows one. One can see him here, thrusting the pike through the foot of Shibanov who came with his message from Kourbski and the Poles, and delivered it without a tremor, while Ivan listened with gleaming eyes, leaning all the while heavily on that staff.

Madness and terror ! Wholesale executions on the Red Square. The massacre of thousands at the sack of Novgorod ! Moscow set alight by an invading army of Tartars ; Ivan flying to Rostov, leaving his capital to be devoured by flames which swept the town and spared only the Kremlin ; till finally the Tartars, finding nothing left to plunder, withdrew. The red light of blood and fire lighting up the reign of the most inhuman and savage of all the Rurik Princes, as if with him the race of that great warrior was to die in flaming fury.

And meanwhile Maria, the Circassian, had died, by what means history does not say ; his third wife, Martha Sobokin, lived only a few days after the wedding ceremony ; and when in 1572 the Tsar contemplated marrying Anna Koltovsky, the Church began by forbidding the union. Three wives were allowed by the Orthodox Religion but not more ! Ivan, restless fingers playing with his red beard, blue eyes laughing with evil malice at the clergy's stern faces, made answer that for the care of his motherless children, for the welfare of his kingdom, for the prevention of sin, it was necessary for him to have a wife and a companion ; and, reluctantly, the Church had perforce to yield, no man being brave enough to resist his wishes.

The reign of Anna Koltovsky was not to be long however. Very soon was she despatched to a convent, while Anna

Vassiltchikoff took her place, though whether Ivan legally married her has been doubted. There were others too: Vasilissa Meletiev and the beautiful Maria Dolgorouki, shut into a carriage and driven thus at full speed into a river, till finally came the Tsar's last marriage, to Maria Nagoi, celebrated at the same time as that of his youngest son Theodore to Irena, sister of the great Boyarin, Boris Goudonov.

In the scented stillness of the Terem the tears of women fell unheeded, their soft hands implored mercy in vain; the dark sombre face, the fierce, restless, shifting eyes, the cruel lips half hidden under the red beard: was there any hope of compassion or understanding there? Tall and broad-shouldered, standing in the golden archway of the Terem door, hands clasped over the long staff, piercing eyes going from side to side, the Tsar would be announced, while the woman whom he called wife or only mistress rose to receive him with who knows what trembling limbs, what a shudder of fear or repulsion in her soul!

To be a woman and belong to Ivan the Terrible, Tsar of all the Russias, pitiless and supreme in power; was it worth the net of pearls that bound her hair, the golden cap with its precious stones, the priceless sables that lined the long, falling sleeves of her crimson underdress, the heavy brocade sewn with jewels that fell over it, the shoes of finest red leather, embroidered again with pearls, the necklaces of rubies and emeralds, the rings and bracelets that glittered on her arms and neck? Shrinking away, the woman's eyes would scan the face of the master of her fate. Could she hold him still? And for how long? How soon would her turn come to be dismissed into the dreary depth of a convent, to be got rid of, killed perhaps in some secret, subtle way? Was it a question of months or weeks or days before the inevitable end?

No wonder the Lady Mary Hastings, receiving the Ambassadors of the Tsar of Russia who came to beg for her hand in marriage, flung herself at her father's feet imploring not to be delivered into the hands of that monster. Ivan had desired an English bride, but the Ambassadors returned to Russia, their mission unfulfilled; and the autocrat of Moscow gnawed his nails and railed against the pride and obstinacy of the British race in a harsh, shrill voice.

And now, sending a shudder through all the length and breadth of his great dominions, came that greatest crime of all, the murder of his eldest son, Ivan. As usual in Russian history, the true cause of the Tsarevitch's death is unknown; but the most generally believed story is that the Tsar struck his son's wife for some minor offence so heavily that she had a miscarriage, and that when his son violently upbraided him, he turned in a blind fury, and dealt him a tremendous blow over the head with his heavy, iron-pointed staff. With a scream of agony the Tsarevitch fell to the ground, and overcome with terror, with remorse, with craven fear for his own soul, Ivan wept aloud, nursing the shattered, blood-stained head against his breast, while the frightened courtiers gathered pale-faced in the doorway, and a whisper of horror seemed to make the walls of the Kremlin shiver.

But the scourge of that terror was soon to be removed, for the 18th of March, 1584, the date announced by the astrologers as being the day on which Ivan would die, was approaching. Broken in health, suffering and feeble, the man who had ruled with violence and fear was carried every day into his treasury, playing with the precious stones, having all the works of art, sent to him from every corner of the world, spread out before him. Sitting there, propped in his chair, wrapped in a golden embroidered gown, grey

hairs streaking the red beard, blue eyes blood-shot, fierce still, but filmed with the coming darkness of death ; long, yellow fingers shaking and trembling as they touched some masterpiece of gold or ivory, let the red fire of rubies stain them as with blood, lovingly watched the lights in a great diamond, or shuddered because the turquoises seemed to pale to green. Then at last, playing chess with Boris Goudonoff, the Tsar, putting out his hand to move one of the marvellously carved pieces, gave a sudden, low quivering moan and fell forward.

It was the 18th of March, and the great bells of the Kremlin churches rang out their solemn call above the city, where the first thaw was turning the snow to yellow slush ; and men paused, and uncovered mutely, not daring even now to express relief, lest that departing spirit turn and rend them.

Where had it gone, the sombre, savage, cruel soul that had inspired such terror and suffering ? Was it really only the pitiful, used out body that lay beneath the black velvet pall in the Uspensky Cathedral ? So vivid was the fear that lingered still in his people's minds, so alive did the evil still seem to be, that even until the present day, men passing by that coffin, crossed themselves with a whispered prayer that he who slept there might never rise again.

Madman and fanatic, genius, inhuman monster ! Vainly historians try to probe and reason, violently accuse, or feebly find excuses. Pursued by phantoms, striking his forehead on the ground, praying for those souls he had driven forth in anguish ; spending hours in the torture chambers, coming out as a man rejuvenated, and then unable to rest ; having always in his bedroom three old, blind men who, each in turn, told their endless stories, trying thus to lull the terror-haunted brain to sleep !

That fantasy of his, to place Simeon, the Tsarevitch of Khazan, who had become Christian and been driven out of his dominions by the Tartars, on the throne of Russia ; for a space of time letting him live in the Kremlin, going himself even to offer mock homage and subjection, who can explain it ? His treatment of the Metropolitan Philip, that holy man who heroically refused to bless him, who, after years of imprisonment, is said to have been burnt alive at Alexandrov, who can forgive it ? The attack on Novgorod, on the excuse of a vague suspicion of treachery, the frightful butchery of the inhabitants, the horror of those executions on the Red Square, the murder of his own son, the unspeakable, unprintable debaucheries of Alexandrov, the ghastliness of those secret torture chambers—can one find any redeeming reason for it all, save by saying that his terror-haunted childhood had affected his brain ?

And yet he was not mad in all things. He encouraged foreign trade, he signed the first commercial treaty with England, he fought and made a truce with the Poles, he annexed Siberia, enriched and aggrandised his dominions, adding many provinces. So much he did for Russia, but always will the scales weigh heavy against him, and his name hang like a shadow of terror over Moscow. Always will a little shiver strike one when one stands by that coffin with its fading velvet pall. Always will his ghost haunt the Cathedral of St. Basil where legend says the mendicant monk is buried who alone dared stand up against him. Ragged, dirty, unkempt, feeble and poor as he was, he made the great Tsar afraid of him, told him he was doomed to eternal punishment, laughed at him openly, flicked the money given him on the ground, saying it came from hell and would burn his fingers ! And meekly it seems Ivan submitted to the insults, buried the old man finally in the church, which,

dedicated to the Intercession of the Virgin, is yet always known under the name of St. Basil, in the memory of that poor, beggared monk, who was the only man in Russia not afraid of the Tsar Ivan, surnamed the Terrible.

CHAPTER X

THE LEGEND OF THE FALSE DIMITRI

IVAN the Terrible was dead, and his younger son Theodore, married to Irena, the sister of Boris Godounov, succeeded to the throne. Weak, fat, with a lisping speech, vacantly smiling eyes, and a passion for long church services and endless prostrations before the holy ikons, he was little more than a figure-head, the government of the country being almost entirely in the hands of his brother-in-law, who, having first sent Ivan's last wife Maria Nagoi with her little son Dimitri into exile at Ouglitch, next proceeded to get rid of Bielski, Schouiski, Romanov and Mstislavski from the Council, till finally he made himself Regent, Tsar in all but name.

During our stay in Moscow in 1912, we were taken to see the opera of "Boris Godounov," with Chaliapin, that great singer and still greater actor in the principal part. I had seen the opera already several times in Petersburg; but in the great red and white theatre of Moscow, with every one of the four thousand seats occupied, with the walls of the Kremlin only a few yards away, with the silence of the snow covering the city, and now and then the golden sound of bells from one of the four hundred and fifty churches, one seemed to be living again those days of long ago.

Chaliapin, with his marvellous representation of Boris Godounov, has made the name of the great Boyarin famous

all over the world, and one cannot help always seeing him as he is in the opera, superb and majestic in the long robe of gold brocade when he comes out of the church after his coronation and addresses the people, or magnificent, wild-eyed, haunted, pursued by phantoms, inciting his son to be a great Tsar, while all the time his restless hands play with a crimson silk handkerchief.

Descendant of a Tartar who took service under Ivan Kalita and became a Christian, Boris, though short of stature, was known to have a commanding presence, to possess a marvellous gift of eloquence and a keen judgment. Uneducated, and ignorant in many ways, he believed in the stars and was intensely superstitious. Had not the astrologers told him he would be Tsar of Russia? Who would not believe a prophecy like that? In the half Oriental mind the dream had grown, and one by one the obstacles in his path were swept aside, step by step he worked himself up to a position of unquestioned power.

Knowing all this one cannot help believing that the murder at Ouglitch must have been done at his instigation, and yet the official report drawn up by Vassili Schouiski entirely exonerates the Regent from any part in the crime, and Schouiski was in all things his most implacable enemy. If he had found it possible he would surely have cast some shadow of suspicion on the name of Godounov!

With red-golden hair and bright blue eyes, Dimitri the son of Ivan was growing up, ignorant that his name was to provide one of the greatest, as well as the most dramatic of all the mysteries that fill the history of Russia. Carefully guarded by his mother, Maria Nagoi, he lived at Ouglitch, happily perhaps, with his uncles, his governess, Vassilissa Volokhov, and his nurse, Irena Toutchkova; already it seemed following in the steps of his terrible father—subject

to fits of ungovernable rage, taking pleasure in seeing animals killed or tortured. And the citizens of Ouglitch loved their little prince ; the hand of the Terrible Tsar had not weighed on them over heavily, the terror that surrounded his name was in their eyes something of a halo. He was to be feared, therefore he was to be humbly worshipped and obeyed, consequently he must be great !

In such queer, distorted fashion, does the mind of the Russian peasant work, and good-humouredly the violence of the little boy was laughed at, his turbulent passion commented on. See how brave he was, how determined, how full of spirit, said the citizens of Ouglitch, and smilingly took off their caps as they watched him pass.

So, anxiously shielded by his mother, who seems always to have feared some harm befalling him, the little seven year old Dimitri reached the fatal afternoon of the 15th of May, 1591, and out of all the welter of facts and suppositions, of possibilities and actualities, three aspects of the tragedy stand out more or less distinctly.

Perhaps the most widely spread account of all, as well as the most generally believed is that, while his mother slept during the heat of the afternoon, Dimitri, playing in the courtyard of the palace, was approached by Joseph Volokhov, the son of his governess. Bending over him, Volokhov asked the little prince to show him a collar of precious stones he wore round his neck, and, as the child trustingly lifted his head, struck fiercely at his throat with a knife he had carried concealed. Hearing the child shriek, his nurse rushed out of the palace, but Bitagoroski and Kortchalov, paid emissaries of Godounov, who had been hiding, pushed her away, and swiftly finished the work Volokhov had begun.

Wakened by the commotion, Maria Nagoi in her turn appeared, adding her screams to that of the nurse, the

while she violently attacked the governess as being responsible for the crime. To add to the confusion the bell of the church tower of St. Saviour's, which overlooked the courtyard of the Palace, suddenly began to peal the alarm, rung by some unknown hand, and startled from their afternoon sleep, the citizens of Ouglitch hurried up to the Palace, saw the body of their little prince bathed in blood, and without staying to find out the true facts, wreaked their vengeance on the murderers.

Then was Prince Vassili Schouiski sent to Ouglitch to make official enquiries into the matter, and finally drew up a report that, having suffered for several days from recurrent attacks of epilepsy, the Tsarevitch Dimitri, playing with three companions, fell into sudden convulsions, during which he seized a knife and fatally wounded himself in the throat. The furious ringing of the alarm bell brought the citizens to the Palace, they had mistaken the scene which had met their eyes, and, jumping to conclusions, had murdered innocent people. Accordingly for this crime of avenging a prince of the Royal blood they were grievously punished. Two hundred of them were condemned to death, hundreds more were sent to Siberia, while with them into exile went the great bell of St. Saviour's, which had rung the tocsin uncalled for, and thereby caused such dire confusion.

At last, still more incredible, comes the third story, namely, that it was not Dimitri at all who was laid in state in the Cathedral of the Transfiguration; that some other little boy had been killed in his stead; that, only slightly wounded, he had been carried off by his Uncle Athanase Nagoi and kept hidden in a secret place.

In support of this theory Jerome Horsey then at Yaroslavl, relates how Athanase came to him late one night, begging for medicine for his sister Maria Nagoi, who, he

said, had been poisoned and was grievously ill. But Maria Nagoi was then at Ouglitch, nor is there any mention of her having been ill at the time. For whom then did Athanase so urgently want medicine? And why had he fled from Ouglitch? Why were the citizens of that town well nigh exterminated? For what offence was Maria Nagoi banished to a far distant convent! Vain conjectures and possibilities, questions to which there is never any answer, a maze of theories that all seem intangible, a mystery that baffles and eludes from which ever point one examines it.

For the years passed on. The feeble-minded, vacantly smiling Tsar Theodore slipped quietly out of the world, and with him died the ruling line of the great house of Rurik. The blood of Vladimir still flamed in the veins of the Dolgorukis, the Lobanovs, the Gagarines and the Schouiskis, but the direct succession of the hardy, prolific princes of Kiev had died, for Theodore left no children.

Steadily refusing the crown, his wife, the Tsarina Irena, retired into a convent, and, urged on by the patriarch Job, the people clamoured for Boris. Emphatically at first he refused, but a Sobor or public committee was elected and chose him as Tsar, and at last a huge deputation, led by the Patriarch and the Ikon of the Holy Virgin of Vladimir came to find him at Novodievitchy, when reluctantly, with tears running down his cheeks, he allowed himself to be persuaded to accept the crown.

Was it all a magnificent piece of play-acting on the part of this descendant of a Tartar chief? Or at the last moment did that empty throne, whose steps were slippery with blood, cast a sudden terror on his superstitious mind? And yet, once crowned Tsar, Boris, for all his unpopularity was a great ruler. He was clement and just, he encouraged foreign trade, tried to bring western civilisation into the country

that, having been so long under Tartar domination, had become imbued with Oriental customs. He did all in his power to ameliorate the lot of the peasants, sent young Russians to be educated at foreign universities, tried to induce English, French and German professors to come to Russia, and arranged a marriage between his daughter Xenia and a Danish prince.

Misfortune seemed, however, to dog the footsteps of the upstart Tsar. The Danish prince, arriving in Moscow to marry Xenia, died, of over-eating, it was said. A terrible famine swept the country ; not all the money he so generously disbursed could allay the frightful sufferings of the people. The young nobles never returned from the foreign universities to spread their cultivated refinement through the country. Signs and portends foretelling calamity and disaster were seen all over Russia. The Tsarina Irena died in her convent, prophesying years of sorrow.

And always, do what he would, in the eyes of the people, imbued with legends and superstition, Boris was not the rightful Tsar. They had chosen him and acclaimed him, and yet in their hearts they could never do him homage ; he could never be more than a pretender and a usurper. Often looking out over the city of Moscow with its fantastic medley of churches, palaces, and wretched hovels, the dark, Eastern eyes of the man who had dared to seize the crown of the Rurik princes must have been full of utter despair. Bitter, disappointed, fighting vainly against unconquerable elements, pursued by phantoms, so it is Chaliapin represents him, and so it is one cannot help seeing him and feeling sympathy with him.

Then in the winter of 1603—1604, the name that for so many years was to cause strife and bloodshed throughout the lands of Russia began to be whispered, furtively at first, and

then ever more loudly, more persistently, with greater confidence. Dimitri, the son of Ivan the Terrible ! The False Dimitri ! The Phantom Tsar ! Surely in no other country but Russia, that land of unsolved secrets and eternal mysteries, could such a story be possible ; a story that till this day has never been fully understood or explained, that all the chronicles, all the histories, seem only to make more involved.

Who was the first false Dimitri ? Was he in truth the Monk Grishka, or Gregory Otrepiev ? The theory seems to be lacking in certainty and entire reliability, and yet it is supported by a good many historians. Grishka Otrepiev, born of humble parents, was originally a servant in the house of the Romanovs, and being sent away in disgrace, entered a monastery. Always unruly and unrefined, an incorrigible vagabond, he wandered from place to place, and at Kiev, on the excuse of a pretended illness, confessed to a priest that he was Dimitri, the son of Ivan, showing as a proof a jewelled cross. How he further obtained confidence and support, how he was received by the King of Poland, how the magic of his name spread like wild-fire through the country, seems almost incredible when one examines his antecedents.

To add to the confusion of it all comes the theory that there were two monks who pretended to be Grishka Otrepiev, and to one's further hopeless mystification, the historians differ and contradict each other, some affirming that the real Grishka changed places with a companion named Leonide who subsequently called himself Otrepiev, others stating that the false Dimitri was a totally different person and never had anything to do with the renegade monk, till he ordered him to come to his Court at Poutivle, and even took him with him in his following to Moscow, from where he

was presently exiled to Yaroslavl on account of his disorderly behaviour.

But if the phantom Tsar was not Grishka Otrepiev who was he ? The question, then as now, remained unanswered, and Dimitri, assembling his army at Poutivle, and paying his passionate court to Marina, the daughter of the Palatine of Sandomir, continued to be a growing danger, an unsolvable enigma.

Defeated by the troops of Boris, pressed and besieged on all sides, he yet remained unconquerable, his popularity, the mystery that surrounded him, the romance of his name ever gaining ground, till it became an obsession with that other upstart Tsar in the Kremlin, robbing him of sleep and appetite, preying on his mind, following him from room to room, till at last, on the 13th of April, 1605, having held council all the morning, he was struck down after dinner with a sudden hæmorrhage and died within two hours.

Murder, suicide, or just a failing of the distraught, embittered brain ? Who can say when so much remains for ever unaccounted for. His fifteen year old son Theodore, worshipped and adored by his dead father, trained with rigid care for his brilliant future, was elected Tsar with his mother to act as Regent, and it seemed almost for a time as if the Godounov dynasty would in truth hold the throne of Russia.

But who can trust a people's loyalty ? Already on the 22nd of May the submission of the army was brought to Demitri at Poutivle, while in Moscow the populace rose in his favour, storming the Kremlin, imprisoning Theodore with his mother and sister, arresting the Patriarch Job and exiling him to Staritsa.

But not without a shadow of crime was Dimitri, beginning his triumphant march on Moscow to reach the throne, for



A BOLSHEVIK DEMONSTRATION IN THE RED SQUARE, MOSCOW.



either by his orders or with his tacit consent, Theodore and his mother were murdered in the grim old Godounov Palace, the body of the boy who was to have been a great Tsar was publicly exposed, while his sister, the lovely dark-eyed Xenia, who in her despair had tried to poison herself, was saved by Dimitri's orders, for he had heard of her beauty.

So the girl who was to have been the bride of a king's son was held for the pleasure of the phantom Tsar, the man—peasant or monk or prince—who worshipped the fragile grace of Marina Mniszech, but who, with his ardour and almost fierce vitality, seemed to have been given also some of his supposed father's love for the beauty of women. And Xenia was very lovely, so lovely indeed, that Marina, hearing rumours, presently grew jealous, and to placate the feelings of a little Polish Princess, Xenia was sent into the grim solitude of a distant convent, where many years later she was again to be taken prisoner by Cossacks.

Squat, broad shouldered, coarse featured, and yet possessing a certain irresponsible charm, impetuous and brave with the strength of a giant, Dimitri was meanwhile startling his subjects and upsetting their ideas of the pious, somewhat effete inefficiency of sovereigns, by riding untamed horses, taking part in bear fights, and never resting in the afternoon. The almost exalted enthusiasm that had attended his welcome to the city, when, surrounded by Russian Boyarins, Polish noblemen, priests in gorgeous vestments, and Strelitsii in scarlet and gold, he had made his triumphal entry, was beginning to waver.

To the common people he was still the long lost Tsarevitch Dimitri, but, encouraged by the Boyarins, the friction between the Russian and Polish factions was growing. The suspicion that Dimitri was nothing more than an impostor was whispered abroad. It was rumoured that he had turned

Catholic ; even his clemency in pardoning Vassili Schouiski, condemned to death for refusing to acknowledge him as the Tsarevitch, fed the growing discontent.

The arrival of Maria Nagoi, known now under the name of Marfa, from the long exile of her convent, her public recognition of the Phantom Tsar as her son, only adds to the mystery. Did she really recognise in this broad-shouldered man with the laughing, audacious eyes, the little golden-haired boy of Ouglitch ? Or, still filled with her hatred of the house of Godounov, did she smile quietly to herself, as she acknowledged the impostor who had overthrown their rule ?

For eleven months the phantom Tsar reigned in Moscow, while all the time his enemies plotted to overthrow him, and the list of his supposed crimes against the people grew from day to day. He was an impostor and a renegade, a heretic and a vagabond. He was accused of vast extravagance, of profligate living, of conspiring with the Pope against the Orthodox Church. With the arrival of Marina, accompanied by a huge retinue of Poles, with the brilliant celebrations that attended her wedding and coronation, the dissatisfaction reached its height. Assiduously the report was spread about that Dimitri and the Poles were planning to kill all the Boyars, that the sham fortress, the masquerades and mummeries only hid more sinister designs, while on the other hand, to incite those who were loyal to the pretended son of Ivan, it was whispered that the Poles were plotting to assassinate the Tsar.

So, while the early dawn of the 17th of May, 1606, still veiled the Kremlin in dusk, the tocsin was suddenly sounded in the city, clamouring bells from all parts taking up the call ; the gathering crowd, urged on by the emissaries of Vassili Schouiski, that thankless traitor, pardoned by a too

clement master, swept on towards the Kremlin, where the armed guard, faithful to Dimitri, had been withdrawn and replaced by men in the pay of the conspirators. The Poles were massacring the Russians! So the cry was sounded, and the great crowd, not knowing really what it sought, caught the fatal infection of the lust for blood till it became like a ravaging beast, intent to kill, hunting the Poles through the still darkened streets, drawing ever nearer and nearer to the great Kremlin walls.

Starting up from Marina's side Dimitri sent Basmanoff, that most faithful friend, to enquire into the cause of the uproar. It is perhaps "a fire in the city" was the answer given by one of the guards, but Dimitri, listening to those howling voices, shook his head, while the terrified Marina wrung her hands.

The crowd were in the palace now. Basmanoff, going bravely out on the staircase to try and hold them back, was struck down and trampled on, and when Dimitri, baring his mighty arms, sent for his sword it could not be found, and always that hideous clamour was drawing nearer. The Strelitsii Guard were some way off, but they were faithful to him; if he could get to them, lead them to the attack he might still save the Crown! The first pink light of the spring day flushed in the sky as the grim chase began in the palace, till hunted, trapped on all sides, Dimitri either slipped or flung himself from one of the windows, falling with a sickening crash on the stones of the courtyard.

Here some of the Strelitsii found him, and, bruised and bleeding, he was carried into the guard room. Waking to tortured consciousness his eyes rested on the bearded faces of the Boyars who had assembled, beating down the resistance of the Strelitsii with threats to murder their wives and children did they dare defend the impostor, and feebly

the Tsar signed to the hesitating men to let him be. Through the swaying mists the threatening figures closed in, bullets and sword thrusts, insults and blows rained down on the man who, for a short time had been all powerful.

Ignominiously the poor, broken, shattered body was dragged through the streets to the Convent of the Ascension where it was shown to Maria Nagoi. "Is this your son?" she was asked, and shuddering, she turned away. "You should have asked me sooner," was all she said. "Such as it is I cannot say it is my son." Her evasive words were taken as a denial, but again one wonders what was really in her mind.

Then the body of the Phantom Tsar was stripped, and put up on the Lobnoie Mest, with the body of the faithful Basmanoff lying at its feet. The wounded face was covered with a hideous, ribald mask, and for three days the curious crowd came to gaze on this renegade monk, this daring impostor who had had the effrontery to place on his head the sacred crown of the Monomachs. And meanwhile in the city the massacre of the Poles continued. Marina was saved by hiding beneath the full skirts of one of her women; her father garrisoned in his palace, was spared by the intervention of Schouiski, till at last after three days the tempest died away, the body on the 'Lobnoie Mest' was taken down and flung into the waste land beyond the walls, where outcasts and beggars were allowed to rot.

But not so easily could the False Dimitri be destroyed. His figure was seen moving haltingly among the shadows, while blue flames flickered all night long over the waste land. The body was buried deeper, but still, over the grave, the flames fluttered in the dusk, and still the citizens came with their tales of the dread figure of the Phantom Tsar. So at last the body was dug up again and burnt, and, so as to

leave no trace at all, the ashes were discharged through a cannon in the direction of Poland.

And yet Vassili Schouiski, elected Tsar, found his position none too easy. The name Dimitri Ivanovitch was on all lips. The official proclamation that the impostor had been none other than Grishka Otrepiev, the utter disappearance of the latter from Yaroslavl, even the exhumation of the body of the little Dimitri at Ouglitch, the state burial in the Archangel Cathedral, the beatification of his name, could not still the restless disquiet that stirred the country.

Marina and her father were banished to Yaroslavl, the old Tsaritsa Maria Nagoi was sent back into her convent, and still the Phantom Tsar could not be laid to rest. The rumour even grew and spread that the body of the masked man put up on the Lobnoie Mest had not been Dimitri at all. Why had a mask covered the face, people asked meaningly? Was it not true that below it a beard had been seen, and had not Dimitri been clean shaven? And had not hairs covered the chest, when Dimitri was known to be smooth as a girl? But if some other body had been placed on the Lobnoie Mest, then where was the murdered Tsar? And was he really dead?

So the people whispered among themselves, while on all sides insurrections and rebellions broke out. False sons of Ivan the Terrible and of Theodore gathered insurgents to their banners. Bolotnikoff, pretending to have seen Dimitri alive, marched triumphantly through the country to prepare his way till he was besieged, conquered, and killed at Toula. the second False Dimitri rose from the shadows of mystery, Cossacks and Poles flocking to his stronghold at Toushin, where Marina and her father, escaping from Yaroslavl, came to join him, publicly recognising him as the Phantom Tsar, though in reality there was little resemblance between the

two men except that, like the first False Dimitri, there seems to be no certainty about his real identity, rumour crediting him alternately with being a Czheque, a Jew, or a son of old Prince Kourbski.

Almost minutely small and slender, frail, dark-eyed and pale, Marina was possessed with a consuming fire of ambition which led her to brave all dangers, to defy all prudence and commonsense, to endure all hardships. Even when, confronted for the first time with the second False Dimitri she shrank away with an involuntary shudder of distaste, she yet overcame her horror and acknowledged him as the husband whose passionate love she had seemingly returned.

In her mind was still perhaps the image of her triumphant entry into Moscow in a painted carriage drawn by ten piebald-horses, the shouts of the populace who acclaimed her, the bells of the Kremlin ringing their welcome, the fire and glitter of the jewels Dimitri gave her with such abundant generosity. Did the hope of such another triumph make the sacrifice worth while, and compensate her for enduring the kisses of her second husband?

And meanwhile Russia lay divided between two Courts, one at Moscow and one at Touthin, and between two Tsars neither of whom had sufficient courage or confidence in their position to march out openly against the other. But at last Schouiski called in Swedish troops to his aid, and after his fruitless siege of the Troitsa Monastery, the Brigand of Touthin, seeing his cause lost, fled to where, Kalouga Marina presently joined him.

Then in 1610 came the abdication of Schouiski, the election of a Polish prince as Tsar, and, shortly after, the death of the second False Dimitri in a Tartar ambush. Widowed for a second time, Marina still clung to her dream of empire, her baby son was acknowledged by her followers as heir to

the throne, while the love of Zaruchi, the great Cossack Hetmann, whose beauty, high courage and daring woke in her cold, calculating little heart, the first real feeling it had ever known, carried her on from adventure to adventure. But at last in 1614, captured by their enemies, Zaruchi and Marina were brought to Moscow, the heroic cossack rebel was impaled, the little four-year-old Ivan was hung, a pitiful martyr to his mother's ambition and the cause of an unknown impostor, and Marina herself was strangled in the darkness of her prison.

So ended the legend of the False Dimitri and still the oft repeated question, "Who was the Phantom Tsar?" remains unanswered.

Was he in truth Grishka Otrepiev? It hardly appears likely. Grishka was common and plain, a vagabond and a rascal; could he for eleven months have governed Russia with that high daring, that keen, progressive policy of Dimitri's? Was he a pupil of the Jesuits brought up by them in the belief that he was heir to the throne of Moscow? Was it all a tortuous, intricate scheme of the followers of Loyola to win Russia to the Catholic Faith? The hypothesis has been put forward by several historians but has been generally discredited, as Dimitri seems to have shown none of the religious fanaticism or scholarly education of a pupil of a Jesuit College. Was he then a creature of the Poles put forward by them to subject the ever-growing power of Russia? Or an illegitimate son of one of Ivan the Terrible's six or seven wives? Or was he really Dimitri himself, escaped from Ouglitch, kept hidden till he was of age to proclaim himself? Had some other little boy's body been buried in his stead?

It is a possibility, but against it there are the miracles supposed to have been performed at the tomb of St. Dimitri,

and to prove that the Phantom Tsar was the authentic little boy of Ouglitch, makes those miracles impossible. Who then was the False Dimitri? The Tsarina Maria Nagoi, dying in her convent might have told. The great bell of Ouglitch exiled to Siberia perhaps guessed. The walls of the Kremlin perhaps knew; but all of them are dumb, and we can only, dimly groping, build up theories, write romances, and dream dreams.

CHAPTER XI

OTHER MEMORIES OF MOSCOW

MANY other pictures of the Kremlin come crowding in my mind. Painted rooms with low arches, state staircases, carved doors and gates of richly chased bronze, gilded railings, huge rooms with polished floors. The hall of St. George ; the Private Chapel of Our Saviour on High where the princes sought sanctuary. The Terem with its low chambers and crudely coloured walls. The Hall of the Feasts, part of the oldest palace built in 1473, with its throne of carved wood, its brilliant rag carpet, its benches covered with gay coloured embroideries. Here the Tsar held audience or gave huge banquets while the women watched from the "Tainik," or little window in the wall, covered with a golden grating, and foreign ambassadors marvelled at the gold and silver plate, the wealth of jewels and gorgeous apparel.

I remember going round the Treasury where the glittering armour of old time boyars shone in the shadows, where helmets and daggers, shields and swords lay idle, their work of fighting done ; stray sunbeams lighting here and there on some finely carved handle, some richly adorned breast-plate. Asiatic, Polish, Byzantine, Turkish, German—arms of all the countries of the world were here, with the fading colours of Polish and Hungarian banners, the heavy richness of Imperial Coronation Standards. Then in another

room the fire of jewels flaming in the old crown of Vladimir Monomachus, while beside it lay the 17th century crown of Siberia, the curiously shaped crown of Kazhan, the heavy crown of Peter the Great, the Maltese crown made especially for Paul.

Here, too, was the ivory throne brought to Russia by the last of the Byzantine princesses, Sophie Paleologue, married to Ivan III., surnamed the great, the throne of Boris Godounov sent to him by the Shah of Persia and studded with two thousand precious stones, the quaint double throne of Peter the Great and his brother Ivan, and the throne of the Tsar Alexis studded with eight hundred and seventy-six diamonds, as well as over a thousand other jewels. On the ground floor were the gorgeous carriages carved and gilded, lined with velvet and furs, the closed in sleighs fitted up as rooms, with tables and divans, the costly jewelled harness and priceless services of china. Going on to the Synodal Treasury where the crowns of the Patriarch, the gorgeous vestments and vessels of gold and silver were kept, one came away at last with a feeling almost of intoxication, one's eyes tired by the glitter and shimmer of jewels, the sheen of rich brocades.

Gratefully one turned to the golden twilight of the churches, where from the shadows, the faces of gentle Madonnas smiled at one, where the great, burnished gates of the Iconostas, which in the Russian Church replaces the Rood Screen, shut off the Sanctuary from the rest of the building, where little guttering candles flickered unceasingly before some Holy Image, and in the dusk, kneeling figures sunk in an ecstasy of prayer, remained impervious and unconscious of one's passing. The Cathedrals of the Kremlin! What is there about them that is so hard to forget? The Uspensky Sobor with its golden painted columns and dim old frescoes,

its Ikon of the Virgin of Vladimir, painted by St. Luke, brought originally from Jerusalem to Constantinople, then taken to Kiev and Vladimir, and finally, in 1395, brought to Moscow.

Here the Tsars and Emperors were crowned; here nine Patriarchs lie buried; here Alexis, that wretched son of Peter the Great abjured his right to the throne, and here, on the outbreak of wars, the rulers of Russia came to pray for victory. The Cathedral of the Archangel, where forty-seven Tsars rest in their plain coffins under their velvet palls! The body of the little boy murdered at Ouglitch is buried here, and Michael Vsevolod, Prince of Chernigoff, who, refusing to worship the Tartar gods, fell, a martyr to his religion, and Ivan the Terrible, and that young warrior Michael Skopin Shouiski, adored by the people of Moscow for his courage and daring. The great Cathedral of the Assumption with its floors of coloured jasper, its doors covered with panels of finely worked bronze carvings, its square columns, and painted walls.

Here the Tsars were wedded and christened, and here, too, is the picture of the Virgin which Dimitri Donskoi fastened to his black banner when he fought against the Tartars at Kulikova. There is, too, the little church of St. Saviour's in the Forest, built on the site of that first wooden chapel that stood alone on the Kremlin hill, when all the country round was forest and meadows. And then the bell tower of Ivan Veliki, rising to its height of three hundred and twenty feet, topped by its golden dome. Here hang the thirty-three bells which send their triumphant music to the skies, while, mute and silent on the square below, the great "Tsar Bell," which weighs two hundred tons and was destroyed by fire, stands on the pedestal erected by Montferrand.

Nearly opposite Ivan Veliki on the Imperial Square,

rise the rose pink walls of the Chudoff Monastery founded in 1358 as the seat of the Metropolitan of Moscow. Here Grishka Otrepiev, said to be the False Dimitri lived, here Vassili Schouiski came after abdicating the crown, and here the Patriarch Hermogenes was starved to death by the Poles.

They say that when Ladislas, son of Sigismund of Poland was chosen Tsar, and old Schouiski, last descendant of the Ruriks to hold the throne, sadly acknowledged his failure to save his country, ghostly voices were heard chanting a Requiem in the Archangel Cathedral—the voices of those Rurik princes who mourned the ending of their race. Troublous times indeed for Russia. A Polish garrison in the Kremlin; Hermogenes from his prison inciting the people to rise against the heretics and invaders, Moscow swept by a devastating fire, bands of Cossacks and marauders scouring the country, famine spreading a claw-like hand over the towns and villages. Then from the people, cowed, starving, leaderless and distraught, stepped the burly figure of Kazma Minin, the meat and fish vendor. A man, bluff and common, probably very often drunk, ignorant and uneducated, and yet, in his simple directness of purpose, something of a national hero. Alone, he knew he had not sufficient weight to be a leader for the people, so, with his plain blunt honesty he went to Prince Pozharsky, then nursing his wounds at his estate near Moscow.

“ You and I to save our country and the Orthodox Faith.” Minin’s words were few, but Pozharsky, grasping the big hand this plebeian held out to him, saw in him the man who put his country before everything, and, rough and ready soldier as he was, agreed to head the insurrection.

Gladly the people flocked to their call; the heroic Hermogenes, slowly agonising in his prison, was urged by the

Poles to order the armies to disband, but steadily refusing to do so, died at last, a prayer for Russia's safety on his lips, and perhaps in his heart a vision of her ultimate release.

And now, shut up in the Kremlin, surrounded by a ruined city, an unfriendly populace and invading armies, began the terrible siege of the Polish garrison. Through the golden days of August, the soft grey days of September, waiting always in vain for the help Sigismund was to send them; lacking ammunition, lacking water, lacking food, eating the bodies of cats and mice, boiling down treasured Greek missals to a kind of gruel, they still held on with a grim endurance behind those impregnable walls. Famine stalked there stark and naked; cannibalism, frightful and terrifying, grinned with chattering teeth from the shadows. Death and disease and despair held carnival.

Then, in October, the outlying Kitai Gorod surrendered to Pozharsky and Minin, and a few days later the Poles marched out of the Kremlin, leaving the devastated churches, the ruined palaces, the ghastly relics of their heroic resistance behind them. The banner of the Russian double-headed eagle floated again above the liberated citadel, the hand of St. George had once more been stretched out to save his holy town of Moscow, and in the Red Square the people knelt with tears streaming down their faces, when the Ikon of the Virgin of Vladimir was carried out unharmed.

But Sigismund of Poland with his son, too late indeed to save the starving garrison of the Kremlin, was still advancing on Russian land, and there was no crowned, elected Tsar to confront him with his sacred rites. For a time the people wavered between the Romanovs, beloved ever since the memory of Anastasia, the first wife of Ivan the Terrible, one of the Galitzins, or the Schouiskis or Pozharski himself. Feodore Romanov, nephew of Anastasia, had been disgraced

by Boris Godounov, torn away from his wife and children and banished to a monastery, where he took the name of Philaret. His son Michael was only sixteen years of age at the time of the surrender of the Polish garrison, and when the choice of the people fell on him, his mother for a long time hesitated to let him take the heavy responsibility of the crown of Russia.

But at last on May 2, 1615, he made his triumphal entry into Moscow, and with his coronation on July 11, began the long dynasty of the Romanov sovereigns. The troublous times were ended, the citizens of Moscow could once more rebuild their ruined city, carpenters and masons worked by day and night, while the young Tsar, aided in the difficult task of governing by his father, who had been elected Patriarch, slowly overcame the rebellious Cossack armies, and the Poles who still fought for the supremacy of the Russian lands.

On the Varvarka, not far from the Red Square, stands the old house of the Romanovs, which has been restored to nearly the same state in which it was when Theodore Romanov first looked down into the crumpled pink face of the baby who was to be the grandfather of Peter the Great, and the first of a long line of Emperors. On the second floor, above the kitchens and servants' quarters, was the big room called the Chamber of the Cross, where the head of the house in his stiff robes of brocade received the priests who came on feast-days to bless the dwelling. Here, too, were given the banquets where men ate hugely and drank heavily, discussed the state of Russia, the wisdom or foolishness of the Tsar's government, the beauty, wit, or stupidity of their wives.

On one side of this room was the private study of the Boyar, and on the other a small oratory, with beyond, two dark shut-in rooms used as a nursery. From there a wind-

ing staircase led to the terem or womens' apartments, where the long, aimless, empty days of the Boyar's wife passed in unending boredom and neglect.

Unless she had seen her future husband at some state church service, she very likely did not even know what his face was like before she married him, while the thickly veiled bride, who, her trembling hand in his, went through the long church service by his side, remained a mystery to him, till after dining, he stepped into the bridal chamber, led by eight little boys with burning candles which they placed round the room before retiring.

Colour and romance and brutal savagery, always side by side. The clear melodious voices of the Kremlin bells, the shrieks of some wretched prisoner receiving twenty strokes of the knout on the Red Square; miserable hovels, hardly fit for animals, the glittering domes of the great cathedrals, the barbaric splendour of some Boyar's palace, the gorgeousness of the reception rooms, the stark discomfort of the living apartments; everywhere magnificence and misery jostling each other.

The impressive majesty of the Kremlin walls, the blue mist that rises from the river and drifts across the low waste land where the mangled body of the False Dimitri was thrown. Starving beggars crowding on the steps of the churches. Boyars in gleaming brocades, velvets and sables, jostling the gorgeous Strelitsii Guard, the Tsar in a golden dress, embroidered with pearls and precious stones, a queer shaped fur bonnet with long, thin golden chains on his head, riding down from the Kremlin to go hare-hunting. From the churches the sound of singing voices, from taverns and palaces the sound of drunken merry making, from some secret cell the heart-broken sobbing of a woman, the groans of tortured prisoners.

I remember going through fantastically magnificent rooms in old, dim palaces in Moscow, buying painted, wooden toys and lacquer boxes in the big Peasants Workshop near the Theatre Square, wandering in dusty curiosity shops where broken pieces of jewellery, Caucasian daggers, battered samovars, brilliant oriental embroidery and bright-coloured leather shoes lay in unutterable confusion, and then going on to the warehouse where the gorgeous brocades for the priests vestments were sold, fashioned of gold or silver stuff, sometimes so stiff that they could almost stand alone, with intricate patterns of crosses, chalices, lilies and doves woven into them, or plain and soft as the thinnest of silk. One fingered them almost reverently, let the shimmering folds slip through one's fingers, and thought of those old frescoes on the walls of the churches, where saints and princes, noblemen and queens, walked softly with the splendour of their brocades in never ending processions.

Always in all things, was there about Moscow an old world atmosphere, something that set it apart from Europe. Petersburg, for all the breadth and brilliance of the Neva, the glitter of golden domes, might from some aspects have been a cosmopolitan city, the society might have been that of London, Paris or Vienna, but Moscow had remained entirely Russian, keeping proudly aloof from the changes of modern customs.

Clearly I remember a dinner given us by the Director of the Kremlin Palace. His wife was a lovely old lady with the whitest of hair, the softest of blue eyes and the most exquisite manners I have ever seen. She might have stepped out of some eighteenth century romance, so gentle was she, so charming and yet never fulsome, always a great lady, always on her dignity and yet never stiff and rigid. Two old men servants with grey whiskers and white cotton gloves

served at table, and we had a true Russian dinner beginning with pickled cucumbers, caviare and vodka, continuing with red Borsh soup with cream, and an endless number of succeeding dishes. Directly we got up from table everybody went to thank the hostess, while, according to the old Russian custom, when the men raised her frail little jewelled hand to their lips, she bent and lightly kissed their forehead.

It was not perhaps a very amusing evening. There were, as far I as can remember, two or three other members of the Imperial household; an old general with a short grizzly beard, and very fierce blue eyes, two old ladies with smoothly brushed hair and wonderful pearls; a young girl in a badly made white dress trimmed with daisies, very pink cheeks, a snub nose, and lovely soft brown eyes; two or three young officers, shy and correct and entirely immersed in military matters, and one nondescript civilian brilliantly clever, but untidy and silent. No, as far as amusement went, one could not say that the dinner sparkled, and yet there was about it a certain charm, the spell of old traditions, the fragrance of something untouched by all the noisy modern glare and glitter, and false meretricious gaiety. It had been like this fifty, a hundred, two hundred years ago, and one could have imagined it continuing so for another hundred years; it would indeed probably have done so, had not the war come, bringing in its train, revolution and Bolshevism.

I have often wondered since what happened to that old lady with the silver hair, and I have hoped for her sake that she died before the Kremlin became a Bolshevik citadel flaunting its scarlet banner in the face of Europe. When war was declared in 1914 and we went again to Moscow for the ceremonies attending the official proclamation of war, I met her again. She was beside me during the service in the Uspenski Cathedral, where the Emperor had come to

pray for victory to be given to the Russian Army ; regardless of her age and her white lace dress, kneeling on the stone floor transported in an ecstasy of prayer, the tears running unheeded down her cheeks, while all the time her trembling lips whispered over and over again the same words, "Oh Lord, give us victory—save our country and the Emperor."

The bells of Ivan Veliki rang out with clamouring voices that same prayer, from all the other churches other bells answered and took up the cry, till the rose-red walls of the Kremlin seemed to shiver, shaken by the thunder, while the huge crowd that stretched away across the Palace Square to the Chudoff Monastery down to the Spasskaia Gate, knelt in rapt emotion, singing the National Anthem. This was no longer the twentieth century. Europe, with its culture and modern progress had sunk away. This was the old Moscow of the Tsars ! Little Mother Moscow, threatened and besieged over and over again, and yet always miraculously emerging from her smoking ruins ! Civilisation, education, imposing on people a stern repression of all feelings, could do nothing here to shake the people's child-like faith. We were back in the days when the sacred ikons were carried into battle, when the Church was more powerful than the state, when the Court of Russia resembled a monastery more than a palace.

Looking out over that kneeling crowd, past those fantastic buildings, those great, golden-domed churches, one could fancy one saw the figure of Ivan the Terrible in a dress of cloth of silver coming down the red staircase to receive some foreign ambassadors or go to witness an execution on the Lobnoie Mest ! Or Boris Godounov riding out to fight the Khan, Kazi Girei, with his army of Crim Tartars ! One could almost hear the hideous clamour when the False Dimitri fought for his life through the Palace

corridors, and the hoarse shouts of the revolting Strelitsii calling for the blood of the Narishkins. Fierce, dormant only, but never extinguished, the passions of those old days would not be hard to wake. Even so, praying, on their knees, had the people of Moscow received the False Dimitri, even so had they acclaimed Boris Godounov as Tsar.

One looked at them, and one wondered, would that lust for killing wake in them again one day? Would they sweep through the streets, their humanity forgotten, swamped in the frenzy that made of them, not men and women, but one great, ferocious beast, mad with the madness of primitive savage instincts. That terrible infection of crowds! What civilisation in the world can guard against it? What principles, what education can quell it or subdue it? Fragments of human beings thrown together, quiescent very likely, dull apathetic and patient, good-natured even perhaps, and then—a spark! A word quickly spoken! A blow given hastily! A woman's scream—the sound of a shot! And the crowd that before was impassive, now just one great, unbridled force, imbued with the instinct to kill.

Late in the afternoon of that radiant August day, we drove out to the Sparrow Hills, and through the shimmering haze looked back at Moscow with its golden domed churches, its glittering spires and crosses. Here on this spot, Napoleon's grand army, weary and battered, halted with the rapturous cry "Moscow! Moscow!" And from here the man who had made himself Emperor of France, had his first glimpse of that fair city of his dreams. The story of Napoleon's entry into Moscow is well known. We have been told of his bitter mortification and rage when he learned that the city had been abandoned by the Government, that no mayor or officials would come out to receive him and hand

him the keys. His entry through the silent, deserted streets where a few, cowering citizens watched him with malignant hatred in their eyes, was not like that triumphant entry he had planned. One old crippled soldier, barring his entrance through the Barovitsky gate, fell beneath the blows of his guard—a nameless victim—but the walls of the Kremlin stood silent and grim, the town seemed almost deserted, the bells of the churches were mute.

Looking out from the palace late that evening did Napoleon draw a sigh of self-content? Had he not conquered the world? Did he not stand now where the Tsars of Russia had stood, autocrat and master of this town of churches and palaces, and riches unthinkable? Many of the holy Ikons, some of the most valuable of the Kremlin's treasures had been removed by Rostopchin, but the decision to sacrifice Moscow had been taken finally at a moment's notice. Kutuzoff, withdrawing hurriedly with his army, had left but little time, and the churches and palaces were full still of their store of gold and silver and precious stones.

The red September sunset flaming on dome and spire, the blue dusk stealing round the Kremlin walls, the sound of moving regiments, of French voices shouting commands, the chorus of a French song rising from some narrow street, the glint of French uniforms along the battlements. War-weary and hungry, the soldiers of the "Grande Armée" had taken possession of the city of the Tsars, seeking to forget with wine and song the grim battle of Borodino, where neither side had been victorious and neither side defeated.

Then, in the gathering hyacinth coloured twilight, a sudden spurt of crimson fire from the warehouses beyond the Trading Rows, another one to the right, the flickering light gleaming on the golden domes, the acrid smell of smoke born

on the soft evening air. Some house burning somewhere ! Ah well ! had not the soldiers been promised Moscow and their share of plunder ? What did it matter if they set light to some old wooden barns ?

But all during the night the flames spread, while fresh conflagrations seemed to start in all directions. The fire brigade and the engines had been removed from Moscow by order of Rastopchin ; the French soldiers, drunk with wine and triumph, at first made no attempt to check the flames, but amidst the rolling clouds of smoke, made the most of the official permission given to sack and pillage the burning houses.

The next morning the sunlight was obscured by the heavy pall of smoke that lay over the city ; the warehouses along the quays were swept by flames, the stores of oils and spirits in the Gostinnoi Door had caught fire, showers of sparks of burning wood and lead rained down on the palace roof ; the Kremlin seemed surrounded by a sea of fire. The crackling of wood, the crashing fall of masonry, the occasional explosion of some store of spirit, the hoarse shouts of those who tried to fight the tempest, the screams of those imprisoned in burning houses.

Was this Moscow ? Or was it a Hell on earth ? Napoleon, who at first had refused to believe that the fires were anything but accidental, was forced at last to see that this city of his ultimate desire had chosen rather to perish than to fall into the hands of a foreign invader. Orders were given to shoot all incendiaries, the Imperial Guard was sent to try and overcome the conflagration, but the elements themselves seemed to fight against the French, and all during the night a fierce wind drove the flames on with increasing fury, helping them in their work of destruction, till at last the

Kremlin itself was threatened, and Napoleon had to seek refuge in the Palace of Petrovski.

Then at last on September 5, a heavy rainfall, which continued for twenty-four hours, quenched the raging fury of the fires, and after three days' absence the conqueror of Moscow rode back into the smoking city, where the silent streets were carpeted with red-hot cinders, where the air was full of the fumes of still smouldering ruins, while here and there a fire still burned with sullen, unquenched ferocity, and a homeless population and a starving army clamoured insistently for food.

After remaining on for a month in the midst of this tragic desolation, Napoleon and his army withdrew, to begin that grim and terrible retreat so well-known to history; while Marshal Mortier, staying on to carry out the Emperor's instructions, finally left Moscow on October 11, firing a cannon from Fili, this being the pre-arranged signal to blow up the Kremlin. But either heavy rain had destroyed the trails of gunpowder laid to the mines, or else the powder itself was bad and the mines badly placed, for the terrific explosion which shattered the silence of the dark October night, and which was to have laid the proud walls of the Kremlin in the dust, did little more than bring down one of the towers and ruin the Nikolsky gate, miraculously sparing the Image of the Saint, and leaving the rest of the walls, the churches and palaces intact.

So once more the ruins of Moscow were rebuilt; once more busy streets, teeming with traffic, formed themselves, and the great Cathedral of St. Saviour's with its five gilt domes, was raised to commemorate the deliverance from the invaders. Museums, theatres, hospitals, schools, factories and warehouses sprang up in all directions, and in every history book one reads how trade and commerce prosper,

how the risk of fire is diminished, how the dangers of invasion and destruction are over.

But when those books were written the word "Bolshevism" was still unknown, and the system of government under the pass-word of liberty had not yet taught the Russian people a more rigid tyranny than they had ever known under Grand-princes or Tartars, Tsars or Emperors.

The Kremlin walls still stand to-day with the scarlet banner flying there, where the Imperial standard with the double-headed eagle used to fly, but the churches are empty and despoiled of their jewelled ikons; the Treasury is bare, in the palaces soldiers with muddy boots lounge on brocaded sofas, and men, who speak of the high ideals of equality and Freedom, the while their hands are stained with blood, give orders, surround themselves with mystery, with precautions and a close protection no autocrat of Russia ever dreamed of.

In the town the streets are falling into disrepair, the houses are filthy and dilapidated, slops are thrown out of the windows, doors and shutters bang, furniture has been cut up for firewood, curtains and hangings torn down. The "House Bureau" quarters whom it pleases on peaceable citizens, who find their home circle invaded by workmen and students, bringing unspeakable dirt and disorder into their rooms.

And if ever the rule of terror ends, if ever the powers that tyrannise over Moscow are overthrown, will they go, leaving anything behind? Or in their passing will they annihilate the pride of those rose-red walls, leaving only crumbling ruins and fetid dust behind. The future alone can say; the future that knows the ultimate fate of the people of Moscow, cowering now under the supervision of the dreaded Cheka, called the State Political Department.

The horrors of the days of Ivan the Terrible, the pitiless executions of Peter the Great, the absolute autocracy of Nicholas II., has not the terror of the Cheka, the iron hand of Trotsky, the fear of the Red Army, surpassed them all? When the blue mist steals up from the river, do the spirits of Moscow's dead gather on the Red Square, does the low wind bring their whispering voices up to the great Cathedrals where the Princes and Patriarchs sleep? And in the Church of the Archangel do they not hold their ghostly Requiem, mourning the fallen might of their country, praying for her future deliverance and reinstatement?

Princes in gleaming brocades, soldiers and peasants and priests, faces evil or cruel or saint-like, jewels that flame with sullen splendour, shimmering candle-light, the flickering fury of flames, drifting smoke and flying figures—the spirits of Moscow, flocking on the Red Square, shifting and passing in unending sequence. The great walls remain impassive, wonderful, the sunshine still lights the golden domes, and the heart of Russia is still an unread secret.



A STREET IN PETROGRAD, 1914.



A STREET IN PETROGRAD, 1920.



CHAPTER XII

THE SHORES OF THE BLACK SEA

I HAVE often heard people describe the Crimea as the Russian Riviera, or else perhaps compare its beauty to that of the Bay of Naples, but to me it will always stand alone, bearing no resemblance either to the south coast of France, or to the loveliness of the shores along that most lovely of all bays, and that most loathsome of all towns in Italy. The Crimea has nothing of that cultured, obvious beauty of the Riviera, with its gleaming white hotels and casinos, its gorgeous villas, its sparkling jewel-like towns, its dusty roads crowded with rich motors, its well-planned vineyards, its fields of sweet smelling flowers, cultivated for the capitals of Europe and the making of scent.

Nor has it any of the sensuous haunting magic of the Bay of Naples, where the huge looming mass of Vesuvius shadows the mirror-like sea, across which the white-sailed boats seem wafted like a dream. The calling fishermen with their strange, dark faces, their songs and flaring torches, the sudden storms, the enervating oppression of the Sirocco, the constant Festas and noisy fireworks. The atmosphere of something brooding, intensely abnormal, restlessly immoral. All this belongs to Naples alone, disturbing and amazingly beautiful.

The Crimea is strange, wild and reserved, hiding under its blue skies and blue seas, its sunshine and its blossoms, a

soul eternally untamed and primitive ; the secrets of the East—history, legend, romance and poetry—which hold all the grim majesty of those rugged brown cliffs, all the unfettered immensity of the forests of pine trees that cover the towering mountains ; all the desolations of the plains, where optical illusions bewitch the weary travellers ; all the beauty of those blue seas, of those orchards of cherry trees and almond blossoms. The charm of those names that read like the titles of fairy stories—Bayadere-Aloupka, Oreanda, Livadia, Massandra, and further on still, Aiou Dagh, Koutchouk, Lambat.

The Romans called the Black Sea simply Pontus, the Greeks at one time named it the Inhospitable Sea, till later on, establishing their colonies, they changed it to Euxine or the *Hospitable* Sea. To these shores Ovid, exiled by Augustus came, and died after nine years of inconsolable home-sickness, complaining of the fogs that sometimes veiled the country in thick mists, of the snow and ice, the bitter winds that swept down from the mountains, and seemingly finding no comfort in the summer sunshine and flowers.

On the east of the Crimea lies the Sea of Azof with its inlet arm of the Putrid Sea, later on called the Sivash, and joining it to the main line is the Isthmus of Perekop, so narrow, that the seas on either side look as if the first storm would bring them rushing together. Long before the Greeks and Romans came to the Crimea it was inhabited by a race of the Tauri, from whom the name Tauride peninsula was derived ; it was also at one time the site of a Cimmerian, and later on, of a Scythian kingdom. The legend that Ulysses came to the Crimea on his wanderings and visited the Bay of Balaclava has been discredited by historians and learned men, but I like to think that this was the “ fair haven of the Laestryons,” that is described in the Odyssey.

“Whereabout on both sides goes one steep cliff unbroken, and jutting headlands over against each other stretch forth at the mouth of the harbour, and straight is the entrance, thereinto all the others steered their carved ships. Now the vessels were bound within the hollow harbour each hard by the other, for no wave ever swelled within it great or small, but there was a bright calm all around” or as another translation puts it, “and smiling calmness silvered o’er the deep.”

Like everybody else I had always associated Balaclava with the “never to be forgotten Charge of the Light Brigade,” my only ideas of it were of rolling clouds of smoke and a green plain, and beyond that I never seemed to go. But when we had stood a moment on the slope where those British soldiers thundered to their death, and turned at last to the Blue Bay, I remember that I caught my breath, shaken by a sudden emotion I find it hard to explain. I know that up to that moment I had been tired and more than a little peevish; four days journey from Petersburg, a day and a half of strenuous sight-seeing in Sebastopol accompanied by luncheons, teas and receptions, with the constant effort of being polite and interested, were all rather wearying, and I had the feeling that I wanted to go away, somewhere quite alone, and not talk for at least twenty-four hours; and then suddenly those blue waters, between the towering cliffs, the little sun-baked Tartar village, the golden ruins of the Genoese fortress and a strange feeling of peace and tranquillity that made me forget all weariness and ill-humour.

For a long time I sat on the little wooden pier in front of the hotel; further down was the Naval Club with its landing-stage and diving board. Lombardy poplars shaded the dusty road, growing up the hill-side were little pink Tartar houses, low roofed and quaint; on the opposite shore a few

white villas, and the only sign of life, some Tartar children playing solemnly at a strange silent game and two young girls walking down the road with a collie puppy who bounded up to me and rubbed his cold nose against my hand. And promptly then I made up my mind to come back one day to Balaclava, buy one of those pink Tartar houses with a baby cypress tree and one or two almond trees in the garden, bathe every day in those blue waters, walk up the winding path to the Genoese fortress, and sit there looking out to the far horizon with only the sea birds to share one's solitude, and at night sleep on the flat roof, looking up at the stars, and listen to the far away whisper of the sea beyond the narrow passage of towering cliffs, as one might listen to the far away voice of the world, shut away from one's retreat.

Not far from Balaclava, towering out into the sea is Cap Fiolente, which legend says is the ancient Cape Parthenium, dedicated to Diana Tauropolitana, to whose temple Iphigenia, saved from sacrifice, came as a priestess, and nearby, where the rocks form a small bay, is the Monastery of St. George set on the top of towering cliffs with little wild gardens, grown by the monks, laid out on the falling terraces.

Founded in the tenth century the old monastery saw many changing races come and go; here the allied armies had quarters during the Crimean War, and here Florence Nightingale had a room, still shown to visitors. It was very empty and silent, the sunny April morning we drove over from Sebastopol, for the monastery supplied the Chaplains to the Fleet, and more than half the Holy Brothers were away, serving on the grey battleships at anchor in the harbour or guarding the coast. The almond trees in the garden were all in bloom, the soft sea air seemed laden with the scent of violets, half-way down the cliffs some yellow broom flamed in sudden, startling splendour.

There was a little white chapel perched there on the rocks, hung it seemed between sea and land, and as we sat under the trees in front of the monastery, an old grey-bearded monk came out and slowly began the long, laborious ascent. Golden brown, amber and red, the great cliffs reared themselves above the sea; the colour of that water—vainly one sought in one's mind for something to liken it to. Aquamarine, turquoise, sapphire, lapis lazuli, all of these it was, and yet not one of them seemed blue enough.

A bell chimed from the green domed church, the sound of singing voices came out into the sunlit silence, in the distant kitchen there was a faint rattling of pots and pans, a tortoise-shell cat curled up on the steps got up, stretched itself with luxurious slowness, blinked solemnly at some white chickens in the garden, yawned again, and settled itself down once more; while far out at sea a thin grey cruel-looking ship drove at terrific pace through the smiling waters. A torpedo-destroyer making for the harbour of Sebastopol, a reminder of the war that raged in hellish destruction miles away from the peace of this enchanted haven.

Further up the rocky coast towards Sebastopol lies Cherson, founded originally by colonists from Bithynia, and turned by the Romans into a military centre of the Crimea. Later on, being a dependence of the Byzantine Empire, it was besieged by Vladimir the Great, Grand Prince of Kiev, and it was here that the Little Red Sun of Russia was baptised in the Orthodox Faith. Golden walls crumbling and falling against a background of a sea intensely blue, the scent of thyme and mint, the soft radiance of sunshine and that nameless mystery that lays a caressing hand on the ruins of dead cities—that is Cherson, a fortress of Mithridates, King of Pontus, a Roman military camp conquered in turn by Greeks, Russians and Tartars.

For in the thirteenth century came the dread invasion of Russia by the Mongolian Tartars, and the great Genghis Khan making Batou Khan viceroy of his Empire in the west, and fixing the Capital of the Golden Horde at Great Serai on the Volga, founding at the same time the town of Bakhchi Serai, extending his conquests into the Tauride Peninsula, till finally Mengli Timur gave it to one of his nephews, ordaining that it be called Crim or Little Tartary.

The Genoese merchants, sending their ships on from Constantinople into the Black Sea, had their settlements too along the shores, making rich commerce in the treasures brought from the far East—silks, perfumes, furs, flax—brought by caravan to the Caspian Sea they were transhipped to the Crimea, the dark-faced men of Genoa and Venice sending them on once more to Italy and France, making much profit through the transaction ; while at Kaffa was the slave-market where the Russians who could not pay the taxes were sold by the Tartars and sent to Constantinople or to the Sultans of Egypt.

Then, spreading fear and terror before him, the great savage figure of Timur the Lame rose on the eastern horizon ; Taimur as he is sometimes called, Timur Khan or Tamerlan, pitiless and unscrupulous, driven forward ever by a restless insatiable desire for adventure, by the spirit of wandering, the desire for new conquests and new countries. Born in Samarkand, he became the leader of the Chagatai Turks, when he was thirty-three, then conquered Persia and won Teheran, where seven thousand victims fell, while later at the siege of Bhagdad, towers were made of the severed heads of men, women and children to serve as a warning and an example. Persia he conquered, invaded India and sacked Delhi ; in Egypt he overcame the Asmanti Turks, and northwards, so far that day and night were almost one, his banners

were seen. By his command his general Tokhtamish fell upon the Golden Horde, murdered the Khan Mamai, swept across Russia and sacked Moscow, leaving twenty-four thousand dead in a ruined city.

The Crimea did not escape the common fate ; the Genoese and Venetians were driven out and the country became a tributary State of Timur's boundless Empire. But after his death a prince of the line of Genghis, saved from the general massacre when still a baby, and brought up in a rough shepherd's hut, came back into his own and became Khan of the Crimea, adapting the name of his protector and calling himself Hadji Devlet Gherai.

The old pink "Palace of the Gardens" at Bakhchi Serai has many memories. Here the Khans converted to Mohammedanism had their harems ; here in the golden, painted halls, crudely decorated in greens and blues and reds they held their Court. Fierce men, fearless and intrepid, dark-skinned, bright-eyed and lithe, they came back to these cool shadowed rooms, tired of the glare of the hot sun, weary of hunting and fighting, or chilled perhaps by the thin mists that drift across the plains. And here in the green gardens with the whispering fountains they lie buried, with a fading turban of silk or brocade still lying on their stone coffins. Here lies Hadji Gherai, and Mengli Gherai, and that Khan who had his tomb unenclosed because "The Heavens were so beautiful that even from his grave he wished to look towards the firmament and the abode of God."

Here, too, is the "Fountain of Tears," erected, so legend says to Marie Potocka, who passed her days in weeping bitterly, held prisoner by Mengli Gherai. History asserts that the legend is untrue, but when one stands in that shadowed room where the beautiful Polish girl was supposed to be imprisoned, one feels inclined—not for the

only time—to think that history is, after all, very unsatisfactory, throwing as it does doubts and disbelief on all that is romance.

Dark and keen-eyed, and in his way beautiful, was Mengli Gherai, and in his harem were women who worshipped him, but though their loveliness charmed him, there was something his restless spirit sought for which they could not give him, and always was he dissatisfied. Then in a warlike raid over the frontier of Poland, he made a surprise attack on the castle of the Potocki, and, among much treasure, carried off with him the old Count's daughter. In triumph he brought her back to his palace at Bakhchi Serai, and those dreams of his, vague and dim in his eastern, half-savage mind, were fulfilled at last, for in this little, captive Polish girl with her white skin and deep blue eyes, he had found what he had hungered for all his life. The women of his harem were neglected and forgotten; all the treasures his palace held, gold brocade and stuffs of gleaming silk, furs and velvets and precious stones, he laid in humble offering at the feet of the girl who shrank in loathing horror from his touch, unconsolated by all his gifts, cold as marble beneath his kisses, weeping the golden hours away in a grief that nothing could assuage.

Day after day he knelt at her feet imploring for some return of the love that consumed him, beating his heart out in vain against the barrier of her hatred and disdain. Appeals and prayers, and offerings of precious stuffs, of flowers and jewels, all alike powerless to stay her tears.

Then one morning he left the palace to go hunting across the plains, seeking in the mad gallop of his white charger forgetfulness from his misery, and during his absence one of the women of his harem, a Georgian girl, filled with hatred for the white doll who had stolen the heart of the Khan, crept,

thickly veiled, to the prisoner's door, and, with soft words, bribed the soldiers on guard to let her pass. Noiselessly, on bare, brown, slender feet, she crept across the shadowed room to the divan, where amidst the green and silver cushions the Polish girl lay in utter abandonment to grief. To have the love of Mengli Gherai and yet to weep—the lip of the Georgian girl twisted in bitter scorn.

In the old days his hand had sometimes played with her dark hair, and he had often called her beautiful, now, because of this white doll he never even glanced her way. Once, twice, three times her slim, jewelled dagger flashed above the weeping figure among the green and silver cushions, and, after one little choking cry, there was silence in the big room; only through the carved wooden shutters came the whisper of the fountains in the garden, the singing of a blue-breasted bird in one of the flowering cherry trees.

It was sometime later that Mengli Gherai, his eyes alight with the intoxication of his mad gallop, came to the guarded door, the soldiers with their bared swords falling back to let him pass. With hands outheld and words of love on his eager lips he came across the room, and then paused with a sudden cry, while beneath the tan of sun and wind his dark cheek grew grey, and his eyes narrowed, fixed in a stare of horror.

Beneath the poplars and cherry trees in the garden he buried her, and to her memory he raised the fountain where the water, dripping like constant falling tears, overflowed into ten marble shells set in a low basin.

I remember dining in a wing of the old palace of Bakhchi Serai, a dinner given us by the mayor of the town, the chief inspector of police, and several other dignitaries. A strange dinner, in a narrow room opening out on to the veranda, a table adorned by a stiff bouquet of flowers in a bright blue

vase, a Tartar waiter with an incredibly yellow, impassive face, bringing us an endless succession of queer dishes.

Somewhere outside in the darkness the town band, consisting of a somewhat cracked violin, a cornet, two or three mandolins, and what sounded like a concertina playing wild, haunting music, the distant subdued murmur of the town rather like the buzzing of an insistent fly, and in the garden the ripple of the fountains, the low whisper of the grasses and the trees stirred by the soft night wind.

The scent of the East over it all, mingled with dust and heat and flowers and musk, and the blended smells of sun-parched grass, of oil and dirt. Against the starlit sky the looming shadow and slender minarets of a mosque, and beneath the trees the tombs of those long dead men, sleeping in the gardens, great fighters and great hunters, restless and unquiet and unafraid. Not far from Bakhchi Serai is Tchoufout Kaleh and the valley of Jehosaphat, the almost deserted city and burial ground of the Kharaim Jews.

Direct descendants of the tribes of Judah imprisoned in Babylon, they are said to have wandered from thence into Armenia, across the Caucasus and finally into the Crimea. Various differences in their doctrines and rules distinguish them from their brethren, and though they have the same keen commercial sense they are scrupulously honest and clean, and are respected by all with whom they come in contact.

One of them, a dark, grey-faced man, with a small, black beard and the eyes of a dreamer, sat next me at that dinner at Bakhchi Serai and I remember liking his quiet, soft voice, his perfect manners, unobtrusive and simple, the forethought through which a plate of hot honey cakes found their way to our compartment in the train that evening, because, having had them for tea at Tchoufout Kaleh, I had said that I found them delicious.

In the fifteenth century the Crimea had become a Dependent State of Turkey, but Russia striving ever for a sea front to further her trade, struggled for many years for the conquest of that Peninsular between the Caspian and the Black Sea. Peter the Great tried to wrest it from the Turks, but though he captured Azof he was defeated near the Pruth and had to surrender it once more—might indeed have lost all his army had not his wife bargained with the Grand Vizier who commanded the Turkish hosts. Through the succeeding reigns, war after war swept over the country, till at last under Catherine the Great the Crimea was wrested from Turkey, and the Empress in her triumphant journey through her new province came at last to the old palace of Bakhchi Serai which the Khan had been forced to leave.

The glittering superficial splendour of the Russian Court mingling strangely in those old eastern halls, Catherine's courtiers tittering and whispering in the harem with its marble bath, the rustle of stiff brocade dresses, the tapping of high-heeled shoes echoing on the stone pavements where the bare feet of women had fallen softly. Music and laughter, the stately grace of a minuet, the quick fire of a mazurka in the hall where the fierce-eyed Khans had assembled their warriors; protestations of love, glowing promises made in the gardens where the fountains sang and dead men slept, fighting and love alike forgotten.

In the history of those times one name still lives, surrounded by many legends of the Caucasus and the Crimea, the name of the Bey Mansour, the man of mystery who came, no man knew from whence, appearing suddenly as the apostle of Allah. The Tartars of the Crimea and the Kuban with the wild Circassians and tribes of the mountains flocked to his standard, and by many he was believed to be the Isman Mansour, who, according to the religious books of the

Mohammedans was to come from the Caucasus and restore the great Tartar Empire. Imbued it seemed by some magic power he was saved over and over again from endless perils, but pursued by the Russian hosts he always managed to escape. The thunder of his great black horses' hoofs would startle sleeping villages at night; across the plains of the Crimea the dust rose in a cloud behind him; in the steep rocky passes of the Caucasus he went where no man dared follow him, till at last when the Russians conquered the Crimea, he and his marvellous black horse both disappeared, swallowed up it seemed as mysteriously as they had come.

Was he captured and killed in some secret ambush? Did that horse of his carry him across the steppes to the edge of the world? Or is the legend true that he was imprisoned for a hundred years in the depths of a mountain cave?

In many ways the Tartars of the Crimea differ from the Mongolian Tartars, those fierce hordes of Genghis Khan who, like an innumerable swarm of locusts flooded Russia and threatened all eastern Europe. In the Crimea, the Asiatic race has been mixed through centuries with Greek and Italian, Turkish and Russian blood, and the dark faces are keen and aquiline, the eyes slope only a very little, though in the expression one can see that Oriental impassiveness, the shut mask that hides all emotions, and leaves one wondering whether behind it there are depths unfathomable, or just utter emptiness.

Perhaps in all the history of the Tartar hordes, the most heroic and most tragic is the story of the terrible retreat of the Kalmuck Tartars across Russia to the distant walls of China, between three and four thousand miles away.

Settled on the banks of the Volga near the Caspian Sea, the Kalmucks had their villages, their towns, and the painted wooden palaces of their Khans. But incited by the

dark-hearted Zebek Darchi, they organised a concerted rising, and against the better judgment of their gentle young Khan Arbachi, started early in January in the year 1711 that long march, leaving behind them burning villages and palaces, taking with them women and children and huge flocks of cattle. Attacked by wandering Cossack tribes, pursued continually by flying columns of the Russian army, a prey to hovering packs of wolves, perishing in their hundreds and thousands, from cold, from exhaustion, from starvation, they toiled on through the long, bitter months of winter, the radiant months of spring, leaving behind them as they went a terrible trail of fallen bodies, the bleaching bones of those who never were to attain the journey's end. The cows and sheep and bullock, many even of the camels had perished, when, in May, having traversed two thousand miles they crossed the river Targan and were attacked by savage tribes of the Khirgizes and Bashkirs who pursued them unceasingly in their onward journey.

Not till September did the Chinese cavalry, sent out to their aid by the Emperor Koan Lang reach the exhausted people by the Lake of Tengis near the Desert of Kobi where they were being once more fiercely attacked by the forces of the Bashkirs. Then at last, for those who remained of the Kalmuck millions, there was peace and plenty, but along the endless roads of their grievous pilgrimage the bones that lay bleaching in sun and wind told the tale of their martyrdom.

Along the shores of the Black Sea, in green valleys, on rough rocky slopes little Tartar villages cluster, mosques with slender minarets, low-roofed houses, whitewashed or painted a faded salmon pink, children with solemn faces wearing stiff red and gold caps look up at one with enormous dark brown eyes, men whose features are more Greek than

Asiatic smile and murmur a gentle greeting, while women peer at one curiously from dark door-ways or rough covered carts drawn by little shaggy horses decorated with blue beads to keep off the evil eye. All the radiance of the East lies about them, all the glamour of a race fast dying out and becoming extinct. The Empire of Genghis Khan of Timur the Lame where has it gone ?

The fountains that whisper in the gardens of Bakhchi Serai, the tombs of those sleeping princes with the turbans of faded and decaying silk, the rocks that fall, golden brown, into the sea, the masses of white cherry blossoms pure as new fallen snow, the ineffable stillness of the Bay of Balaclava, the legends that are only a far away memory ; these are all that remain of the Cimmerian and Scythian Kingdoms, of the rich prosperity of Genoese settlements, the might of unconquerable Tartar armies, the splendour of Russian Emperors.

The great palaces still stand in their green gardens. Livadia, with its sweeping terraces dropping down to the deep blue of the sea. Alupka, built by an English architect for Prince Worontzof and called sometimes the Crimean Alhambra by reason of its intricate Moorish style, Koreiz, the wonderful palace of Prince Yousoupoff, Oreanda, Massandra, Ai Todor. Those who loved them are dead or have been exiled from their beauty, and the roses of Livadia wither, their petals wind-blown down the lawns like the drifting fragments of fallen greatness.

CHAPTER XIII

THE COSSACKS

COSSACK! A word derived probably from the Khazars, of whose true meaning there seem to be many variants—Outlaw, Fighter, Rider! A name to be feared and dreaded; a name connected often with murder and plunder, with the cries of women and children going down under the thunder of horses' hoofs, and the pitiless strokes of the nagaikas or whips with leather thongs weighted with lead. A name associated with adventure, the craving for untrammelled spaces, for liberty and freedom, the constant pressing onwards away from civilisation and laws and conventions, away into the Steppes, into the sandy plains of the Crimea, into the mountains of the Caucasus and far-distant Siberia. A nomad people, a race whose true origin is still hidden, sprung originally perhaps from a branch of the Turco tribe settling in the Kiev district, swelled by Polovtzi stragglers, joined by deserters and fugitives from the continuous insurrections in the cities, gradually adopting the Orthodox Faith and the Russian language.

Not till the fourteenth or fifteenth century do the Cossacks appear to any marked extent in Russian history, and then they could almost be divided into two sections—the Cossacks of the Ukraine, who lived in little wooden villages, cultivated the land, and formed their own republics governed by a "hetman" or chief, and the Zaporoghian Cossacks—

those of "beyond the Rapids" into whose roving camps no women were allowed, whose days and nights were one long combat, always at war with some other wandering tribe of the Steppes, eternally moving on from place to place.

Tartar invasions, the wars of the Russian Princes, the irksome control of either Mongol, Lithuanian or Muscovite Governments, drove the different tribes wandering over the plains, joined constantly by adventurers and free-booters, splitting up and forming into different groups—the Cossacks of the Don, of the Astrakhan, of the Volga, and countless others.

Peter the Great first tried to organise these various bands into regular regiments, but his attempts to make them give up their independence and take up agriculture all alike ended in failure, and not till after the defeat of the Turks did Catherine the Great succeed in wresting the Cossacks' liberty from them.

Subdued they might be, formed into regiments, disciplined, held under the power of supreme autocracy, but always they remained a force that had to be taken into account, like the ancient Strelitsii Guards, a danger as well as a protection; and always about them clung the freedom of great, windy spaces, the atmosphere of wide horizons, of voiceless silences, of restless lawlessness, always the Cossack on his little wiry horse remained a figure of romance surrounded by legend and poetry.

There is a Russian picture which strangely catches and conveys this impression to one's mind, though now I have forgotten who painted it, or even what it is called. It gives one just a view of a track across the Steppes, and a troop of Cossacks riding along, while behind them the burning evening sky stoops down to meet the unbroken plains. Weary, covered with dust, and yet singing as they ride—surely one

of those interminable songs whose haunting melancholy pursues one indefinitely ! Looking at that picture one seems to understand a little what those great plains mean, and what it is that always made the Cossacks different to any other military force in Europe.

The Cossacks of the Imperial Body Guard, tall, bearded men in long blue coats lined with scarlet, which on feast-days were exchanged for coats of vivid red bound tightly round the waist, gleaming silver or ivory cartridge cases in a black velvet band across their chests, and on their heads high conical-shaped, black fur caps ! The Cossacks of the Don, in sapphire blue with little round caps perched sideways on their heads, one long lock of hair on their foreheads ! The Cossacks of Orenburg in dark green, the Cossacks of the Kuban and the Terek in brown coats, the Cossacks of the Ural with their long-haired shaggy caps. They pass across the screen of Russian history, wild, outlaw figures, always to the fore-front of a battle, always seeking adventure, moving on from place to place, always joining in every insurrection—pitiless and ruthless in battle, and yet with the hearts of children, adoring their little shaggy horses, superstitious, absolutely fearless.

Here and there in those flying squadrons, figures stand out with prominent distinctness. Bogdan Chmielnicki, Stenka Razin, Mazeppa, Emile Pougatcheff—their names are written in legend and history, in folk-song, and poetry and romance. Heroes perhaps, or just common adventurers and marauders, rising always to a moment of great achievement, and then overwhelmed by the drifting smoke of failure.

Perhaps the one who is represented the most in the legends of the country, endowed by the people with immortality, and supposed to have been possessed of supernatural powers, is Stenka Razin, or Stephen Timofievitch Razin.

His brother having been hanged by George Dolgorouki for deserting when an application for leave had been refused, Stenka vowed vengeance on all Russian princes, gathered to himself a band of outlaws and brigands, and established himself at the Fortress of Katchalinsk on the Volga.

From here he arrested the passing convoys of barges, among others the caravan of the Patriarch Joasaph, gaining in this way riches, arms and munitions, till presently he and his ever increasing band of followers sailed down the river into the Caspian Sea, overcame and took possession of the stronghold of Iaik, making it into his winter quarters. Legends assert that Stenka used magic words to stop the passing barges, that he had an enchanted boat in which he had power to swim or fly, that, at the Fortress of Tsaritsin he cast a spell on the cannons which refused to fire on him, that the garrison of Iaik were overcome by enchantment, surrendering the fortress to him and his followers without a struggle.

Be that as it may, Prince Prozorofski, Voivode of Astrakhan, tried in vain to dislodge him and his followers and failed completely, and in March 1668 Razin embarked on the Caspian Sea, and during all the ensuing summer ravaged the rich ports and villages along the shore. New recruits were daily joining him ; his power and his fabulous wealth were becoming proverbial ; the fame of his name spread like wild-fire across Russia. In the winter he entrenched himself once more, this time in the harbour of the Island of the Pork, and from here, sailing out on one of his marauding expeditions, he captured the sixteen galleys of the Shah Menedi Khan, making himself master of all his treasures and carrying off his son and daughter as prisoners.

Then, once more sailing up the Volga, he made a triumphant entry into Astrakhan, listened with apparent meekness

to Prozorofski's rebuke and good counsel, gave up some of his munitions, made solemn promises not to fight or pillage any more, and embarked again on his ship with its sails woven of gold and silver tissue, its cords of silk, its awnings of brocade, its hangings of velvet and priceless carpets.

On board with him he carried the daughter of the Persian Shah, whose heart had become enflamed for this rough, fierce captor of hers, and who the legend says was very beautiful. But was not the love of women forbidden to the Cossack soldiers when bent on warlike enterprise? Had her dark, Eastern eyes, her satin skin, her caressing fingers grown too dear to Stenka? Fear, superstition, heroic self-sacrifice, drunken passion—what feeling was in his heart that radiant summer afternoon, when in the middle of a banquet he rose, took the fair Persian princess in his arms and looked down on her with eyes of burning agony. So lovely she was in her silken raiment, the fire of jewels braiding her luxuriant hair, encircling her slender throat, gleaming on her rose-tipped fingers!

The smooth waters of the broad river, whispering against the prow of the ship seemed to mock him with laughing voices; the other guests at the banquet sat in frozen stillness, and slowly the great bandit chief strode across the deck. "Volga—little mother Volga," he cried, and his voice was full of a passionate entreaty, "For two long years now thou hast overwhelmed me with riches; thou hast given me handfuls of gold and silver and precious stones, treasure and wealth of every sort, my heart tells me I owe thee something in return. Take then, that which I cherish most in all the world, the greatest treasure I possess, the most priceless and dear of all my jewels."

Then with his great arms he lifted his burden high above his head and flung her down into the swiftly flowing

river, standing there immovable, a statue carved in bronze, as the golden sails of his ship carried him onwards, and the blue waters closed above the beseeching hands flung out to him in desperate appeal. The sacrifice was accomplished, and he turned to face his followers who had whispered that his passion for the Persian princess was destroying his greatness and his power, and at sight of his rigid countenance they stood silent, abashed, not knowing what to say.

His promise to Prozorofski forgotten, Stenka continued his career of pillage and plunder, captured Staritsin, murdered the governor Tourgueniev, spread insurrection and rebellion everywhere among the people, and finally returned to Astrakhan which was delivered by treachery into his hands. Fatally wounded, Prozorofski was carried into the cathedral which was speedily filled with fugitives from the town. But to the followers of Stenka Razin the church provided no sanctuary ; in vain the great iron studded doors were shut and barred ; in vain Trolboursa, an officer of the Streletsii Guard tried to stem the rush, falling hacked to pieces, as the doors crashed in and Stenka's powerful, broad-shouldered figure strode into the darkened church. Dragged to his feet Prozorofski was thrown down and left to die on the stone pavement of the square, and over all the city of Astrakhan spread murder and terror, while the brigand chief feasted and drank with his boon companions, dreaming mad dreams of further conquest and power.

After Astrakhan Samara, Saratov and Simbrisk fell one by one into Stenka's hands, till at last the armies of Miloslavski and Bariatinski overcame him, and, besieged and betrayed, he was delivered into the hands of his enemies. Loaded with chains he and his brother were taken to Moscow, dressed in filthy rags, led in triumph through the town, tortured in order to try and wring from them the hiding place

of their treasure and munitions, the ultimate intention of their conspiracy, and then finally put to death.

Through it all Stenka kept an immovable silence, an unfaltering bravery. "Have we not had our good time?" he questioned his brother, whose courage was shaken. "Now it is our turn to suffer and we must endure it."

But in the minds of the Russian people Stenka Razin is not dead. The legends say that neither Heaven nor Hell would receive him; that one day he will return and save the country from oppression. Already in Emile Pougatcheff he lived again. His was the same cry as Stenka's: "Down with the Boyars; down with authority; liberty to the peasants." Calling himself Peter III., the murdered husband of Catherine, he marched through the country gathering hundreds of recruits, threatening the government and the State till at last he, in his turn, was captured and put to death. And somewhere the treasure of Stenka Razin still lies in undiscovered splendour; legend and poetry sing his name all over Russia; the verses he made the last night in prison are known by all the people. "Bury me brothers at the three cross roads that lead to Moscow, to Astrakhan and the Holy City of Kiev. Place at my head the Cross which gives life, at my feet my sharp sword. Oh, passing traveller, stay a moment! Before my life-giving Cross say a little prayer. Look at my sword, my terrible, sharp sword, and tremble. He who rests here was an adventurer and an outlaw, but a good fellow. Stenka Razin Timofief was his name."

The story of the Cossack Hetman, Bogdan Chmielnicki, lacks some of the poetry that surrounds the name of the great brigand chief, and yet it is also full of daring and high adventure, and though his dreams only ended in failure

they came very near to achievement ; success indeed seemed almost within his grasp.

A descendant of an impoverished noble family of Lithuania, or, as some think, a son of a Hetman of the Zaparogue Cossacks, he was brought up by the Jesuits, and though they could not induce him to renounce the Orthodox Faith, they taught him to hide his thoughts beneath an expressionless countenance, and gave him the art of a wonderful fluency, the power of persuading men even against their better judgment. Warlike and courageous, he distinguished himself as a soldier, and in a battle against the Muscovites in 1635, received a sword of honour from Vladislav of Poland.

His history might have been very different had not Czaplinsky, a Polish over-lord taken possession of his small domain at Soubotof, carried off his wife and beaten his ten-year-old son to death. In vain Chmielnicki appealed for justice and retribution ; he was put off with vague promises, pointed out as a dangerous man, till at last he took refuge in flight, and swearing vengeance, began to gather together an army of Cossacks and insurgent peasants. Maintaining the greatest secrecy as to his movements he journeyed to Bakhchi Serai, employing that marvellous eloquence of his to win over the Khan, Islam Gherei, to support his Cossacks against the Poles.

Etienne Potocki, sent out by his father, came across the army of the rebels near the river of the Yellow Water, but the fleet of the Hetman, Barabache, which should have come to his assistance was won over by Chmielnicki, who with his Cossacks manned the boats, so that Potocki's army, caught between two fires, was defeated and utterly overcome, he himself succumbing to his wounds. Seeking to avenge his son, Potocki placed himself at the head of an army, but was in his turn defeated and made prisoner, and overwhelmed with

grief Ladislas of Poland died, leaving his country without a king, at the mercy of Chmielnicki's victorious Cossacks.

A time of terror followed ; there were risings of the peasants, terrible massacres of the landed gentry, the Catholics and the Jews, another army of the Poles beaten by Chmielnicki, disorder and chaos everywhere ; till finally Jean Casimir was chosen king of Poland and Chmielnicki made his triumphant entry into Kiev, proclaiming himself Hetman of the Cossacks.

Here, surrounded by pomp and ceremony, he received the envoy from the Polish king but would come to no definite decision, at one time making suave speeches which promised everything but gave nothing, at another moment threatening to over-run Poland with his army of Cossacks and Tartars.

Here, in the Holy City of Kiev, where the ruins of the old Cathedrals still seemed to mirror the greatness of long dead Rurik princes, ambitions and dreams soared in the mind of the fierce old Cossack chief. To free the Ukraine from the government of the Poles, to make himself duke or prince of the Province, to conquer and subdue the Tsar of Moscow as well—that was what Kiev was teaching him, as, wrapped in a coat made of black fox fur he feasted and drank without measure, wild bloodshot eyes looking up at the golden domes, seeing visions of triumph, picturing himself as a second Vladimir.

But the long struggle with the Poles was still not finished. The heroic defence of Zbarcy by Wisnoiwicki was followed by another battle where Jean Casimir himself took command, and finally in 1650, at Sokal in Volhynia, the Polish army defeated and utterly routed the Cossacks, and at last Chmielnicki was forced to write to the Tsar at Moscow, promising submission and obedience to the Russian supremacy.

The glory of his triumphs had deserted him ; rapidly he seemed to go from one defeat to another, deserted and abandoned on every side, till at last in 1657, worn out by a life of hard fighting and hard drinking, he died, leaving his task unaccomplished, and the Ukraine still a dependent state, torn by conflicting passions and warring armies.

With a face of granite, small fierce eyes, tempestuous passions and vivid eloquence, he passes across the screen ; in his way a great leader of men, but lacking singleness of purpose and astuteness of policy, and following him comes the more courtly graceful figure of Mazeppa, known to English readers by Byron's poem.

A gentleman of the Court of Jean Casimir of Poland, Mazeppa was of Russian birth and of Cossack extraction, but, having quarrelled in an unseemly fashion with another courtier, was banished in disgrace to his estate in Volhynia.

Here he fell in love with the beautiful young wife of a Polish magnate, but his intrigue being discovered by the jealous husband, a trap was laid for him, he was caught, and bound naked on his horse which was driven off at a mad gallop across the country. In his poem Byron makes that ride last for days, and carries Mazeppa across the Steppes to a Cossack encampment ; but in reality the horse brought him back to his own estate, and it was his fury at the insult to his pride that made him join the Zaporoguin Cossacks, who in 1687 made him Hetman.

Good looking, bold and fearless, with a genius for intrigue, a keen intuition in reading men's minds, and a power of masking his own thoughts under pretended drunkenness or ignorance, Mazeppa kept his own council, professed complete loyalty to Russia, yet all the time played the double game and remained faithful to Polish supremacy.

Peter the Great had just ascended the throne of Russia



MEMBERS OF THE ARISTOCRACY SELLING THEIR CLOTHES DURING
THE BOLSHEVIK TERROR.



A RESTAURANT WRECKED BY BOLSHEVIKS.

and, recognising perhaps a kindred spirit in the Cossack Hetman, gave him his full confidence and affection, refusing obstinately to listen to the many warnings given him, determined that his opinion was the right one, and that in the tall, good-looking man with the eagle eyes he had a devoted adherent and true sympathiser.

Mazeppa was now nearing the age of sixty, but romance seemed to be part of his life, and a poem of Pouchkin deals with his second great love story which took place at this period. Matrena, the daughter of Basil Kotchubey, was a ward of Mazeppa's, and, brought up in solitude, romantic and imaginative, gave all her girl's heart to the old Hetman. A name, the halo of greatness and renown, a smiling affectionate greeting, a gentle unfailing courtesy—how soon a woman will turn these into love? And the beauty of radiant eyes, the freshness of smiling lips, the joyousness of young laughter—Mazeppa was just not too old to turn away from these. Harshly treated by her father, Matrena fled to Mazeppa's house. Poetry says that they subsequently eloped together, while history affirms with sedate propriety that Mazeppa escorted her back to her parents, though they continued to meet every evening under the willows of the Kotchubey garden. At last, however, these secret meetings were discovered and Matrena was imprisoned, and, eventually yielding to her parent's wishes, married the man of their choice, though often surely the name of Mazeppa must have haunted her mind.

Again and again Kotchubey, determined to be avenged on the man who had seduced his daughter, sent warnings to Peter of the Hetman's infidelity, but, refusing to be convinced, the Tsar, with grim humour, delivered him to Mazeppa, who immediately had both him and his faithful servant executed. All too soon was the Tsar to see how

foolish and blind he had been to neglect the repeated warnings he had been given, for when Charles XII. of Sweden attacked south Russia, Mazeppa, commanded to join Peter with his Cossacks, suddenly went over to Charles. What was in the old chieftain's mind? That long cherished dream of the liberty of the Ukraine? The belief that the king of Sweden would annihilate the Russian Army? A vision of personal aggrandisement—a high command—a crown perhaps?

Visions and dreams all shattered into a thousand fragments at the battle of Poltava, when the invincible army of Charles was scattered to the winds and Mazeppa was forced to fly with the young King of Sweden, seeking refuge under the protection of the Turks from Peter's wrath, and dying at Bender a year later, a bitter, disillusioned, broken old man, whose heart was filled with the unutterable pain of failure, in whose trembling hands great opportunities and high ambitions had turned to shifting ashes.

And in time the great, independent Cossack state he had dreamt of, he with those other outlaws, Stenka Razin, Bogdan Chmielnicki, Zarucki, Marina Mniszech's lover, later on Pougatcheff, and many more whose names history has not recorded, was blown to the winds, scattered in flying particles across the Steppes, exterminated and annihilated by Catherine the Great who broke up and disbanded the Zaporoguin Cossacks, driving some into distant exile, forcing others to settle down as farmers, distributing others again in the various regiments.

But always the need for wide spaces, for the liberty of the great wilds, for adventure, for fighting and wandering remained ingrained in the Cossack nature, and always in all the wars and conquests of Russia their name figures.

In the long wars of the Caucasus, the Cossacks of the

Ciaters, those wandering bands who had settled in the mountains, fought and overcame the Tchetchenzes who were vassals of Turkey, and were the first to plant vineyards and make the Caucasian wines. In the conquest of Siberia a small group of the Volga Cossacks under their Hetman, Yermak Timofeiev, pushed on into the unknown wilderness, extending the territory already won by Ivan the Terrible, and, having overcome Tartars and Astiaks, offered the conquered country to the Tsar. There were those Cossacks who took part in the war with Persia, those others who, in their quest for adventure, advanced as far as Kamchatka, and there were, too, those heroic few, who, under their Hetman Tolbusin, defended the small far-distant frontier town of Albasin from the Chinese in 1659.

For two years, eight hundred men held the walls against an army of Chinese, fifteen thousand strong. Winter and summer passed and came again, and at last, after twenty-four months, the garrison of Cossack warriors, thin and haggard and hungry-eyed, surrendered to the Chinese Generals who, full of admiration for their heroic resistance, treated them with the honours of war and gave them their freedom.

But after a few years Tolbusin returned, undeterred to the half-ruined fortress ; again his Cossack soldiers manned the walls, and again the armies of China gathered round, besieging them for thirteen weary months, till at last the Treaty of Nerchinsk gave the coveted city to the Russians.

A few of the soldiers who had fought in the first siege had, however, been taken prisoners by the Chinese, either in an assembled sortie, or by trying to get through the enemy's lines and go for help. These were sent to Peking and taken before the Emperor, in order to show him what these

Cossacks were, who for two years had kept his armies at bay. And the Emperor looked at the huge, broad-shouldered men with their bronzed impassive faces, with their light beards and fierce blue eyes, and declared that these men who had shown his soldiers how they could fight should be his special body-guard.

Shut within the great walls of China, in the secret city of Peking whose mysteries are impenetrable as the grave, the descendants of those old Cossack soldiers still hold their posts, handed down from father to son through the passing years. Their religion is based on the Orthodox and Buddhist Faith, their names, written in Chinese characters, are still the same, though pronounced in a different way. Their pigtailed are very often fair, their eyes, not infrequently blue, hardly slant at all; an odd confusion of East and West, a strange study in the psychology of inheritance.

Some of these men were sent to defend the Tsian Tsin forts during the Boxer Rising, and still in their veins runs the old Cossack fighting blood, the old craving for adventure still haunts their minds, the old longings perhaps for the great, free spaces, the scent of thyme and mint and sweet wild flowers on the Steppes, the chattering of partridges, the flying shadows of wild geese, the fresh pure winds that sing across the untrodden spaces, the blue smoke of camp fires rising in the still evening air, men's voices that chanted melodies not remembered, but never quite forgotten.

And up to the very last the Cossacks played their part in Russian history, and during the war the so-called "Wild Division" was looked on as invincible. In the revolution of March, 1917, they sided with the people, refusing to fire on the crowd; but in July when the Bolsheviks took possession of Petrograd for three days it was the Cossacks who

took it back for the Government, only to find that Kerensky did not support them.

I shall never forget the charge they made across the Square in front of the Embassy, their headlong rush up from the Champ de Mars and round the corner of our house on to the quay ; the thundering clatter of their horses' hoofs dying away, and then the sudden hideous clamour of unseen fighting, the report of field guns, the sick feeling one had when a message was brought that the Cossacks had fallen into an ambush and that many of them had been killed.

I remember, too, watching the funeral of those men and the dull brooding faces of their comrades who followed the flower-decked coffins. Had not these, their brothers, saved the capital and the Government, and what was their reward ? Kerensky, with the Bolshevik leaders delivered into his hands, liberating the latter with the catch-word phrase that no blood should be shed.

It was a thing the Cossacks never forgot or forgave, and when in the autumn the Bolsheviks again took Petrograd and Kerensky called on them, they refused to follow him ; but in the armies of Korniloff, of Kolchak, of Denikin and Wrangel, the Cossacks fought against the oppression of the Bolshevik Rule ; in the Crimea, in the rocky Caucasus, in distant Siberia, in the Ural Mountains, in the great, limitless Steppes they still exist.

Their camp fires gleam at night across the plains, the sound of their songs comes still across the unbroken silences, and in their hearts they wait for a leader like Stenka Razin to come and show them the way to victory.

Some day, perhaps, that man may come, for Russia is still the land of miracles, the country of the unexpected where no man knows what the next hour may bring forth.

And, though now everything seems dark in the welter of confusion, it may happen that from this hopeless chaos a man may step out, endowed by the people with the magic powers of Stenka Razin, or with the rough eloquence of Bogdan Chmielnicki, and, flocking to his banner, perhaps the Cossacks will once more sail up the Volga, sweep in serried ranks across the country, and thunder at the gates of Moscow, making those men who hide in the Kremlin shiver and turn pale.

CHAPTER XIV

RELIGION, MYSTICISM, MELODY AND COLOUR

So the memories of Russia pass and fade away.—The romances and tragedies of her history, the great figures of those men who governed her, sometimes with justice, sometimes with brutal harshness; the fire of women's jewels, laughter and tears, the refrain of the constant clash of arms that runs through all her legends, the haunting sadness of the songs the peasants sing, the flying figures of wild horsemen across the plains, the swing of dancing feet, the ringing of church bells, the Cathedrals of the Kremlin, little white churches with blue and green and silver roofs, mystery and an incomprehensible charm.

Wooden chapels in the villages with crudely painted, star-covered domes. Wayside shrines where pitying Madonnas and gentle-eyed Saints look out with infinite compassion on the passing crowds. Yellow trams that shriek and rattle, long lines of carts with struggling horses and swearing drivers, little Isvostchiks with small, shaggy ponies and bearded coachmen, following the hurrying passers-by. "Let me drive you, Barin? We'll go like the wind with my little horse. Look at him and see if he is not nice and fat. I'll take you anywhere you like for fifty kopecks. Eh now, I'm a poor man, but I'll drive you right down the Nevsky for twenty."

Hard-faced men, women with hopeless eyes, laughing

children, moujiks in bright coloured shirts, officers in grey over coats—they pass on intent on their thoughts and their own individual tragedies, and the Saint in the way-side shrine looks out at them in gentle sympathy from amidst the flickering candles.

The Religion of the people is so intimately part of their everyday lives, that, though one may smile a little sceptically at much that is superstition and childish credulity, one cannot help at the same time being stirred to wonder, almost to envy, thus in every room of a Russian house an ikon is placed high up on the wall facing the door, and every one is supposed to salute the Holy Image both on entering the room and before and after a meal. As soon as a baby is born a priest is called in to pray over it. When it is eight days old he comes again to hold it up before the ikon of the Virgin, and to give it a Christian name; then after forty days the official christening takes place in church, the priest makes the sign of the Cross above the baby and carries it in his arms up to the doors of the Ikonastas.

Several times when we were in Russia I went to weddings—strange ceremonies, still retaining a certain Byzantine half-Oriental atmosphere. At their betrothal the couple present two rings to the priest who places them before the altar, and after the Benediction returns them to their owners who then exchange them in sign that they may bestow on each other all their worldly goods.

For the actual wedding the bride and bridegroom are led by the priest into the church, and, after solemnly renewing their betrothal promises, stand, holding lighted candles, while behind each of them a long line of pages takes it in turn to hold two richly jewelled crowns over their heads—symbols of virtue triumphing over the passions! Then the priest, after once more exhorting them to faithfulness,

patience and affection, presents them with the chalice, and, after joining their hands together, leads them three times round the church.

It was believed that who ever first set foot on the carpet specially laid down, should be the ruler of the household, and I well remember a radiant young bride and bridegroom, in spite of the solemnity of the occasion, making an undignified rush, the bride just managing to place her white satin slipper one inch before the bridegroom's heavy cavalry boot, at the same time turning her head to laugh triumphantly at a group of her girl friends. Had she not told them that she was going to rule Nikita with a rod of iron, and do exactly as she pleased in all things?

But this time the prophecy proved very incorrect, for Nikita was a stern, if a very loving husband, and always the absolute master, till he was struck down by a German bullet at Tannenberg ; while that laughing young bride, summoned to the hospital where he lay dying, arrived only just in time to kiss his stiffening lips. Afterwards she devoted her whole life to the nursing of wounded soldiers, was arrested by the Bolsheviks on the charge of counter revolutionary sympathies and died of starvation in prison.

I have often heard people say that Russian funerals give them more belief in Resurrection and Eternity than those of any other church. The constant prayers read over the body, the wonderful singing of the final service, the gleaming candles which are held by all the congregation in sign that the soul of the departed has left the shadows of this world for the ineffable radiance of the true light, the open coffin with the face of the dead turned to the East as if he still joined in the prayers of his friends, the custom that all related should after the service kiss the cold forehead in a last farewell ; all this,

perhaps, makes the dead person still seem part of the living world, going on a journey accompanied by the prayers of his friends, but that last kiss is a terrible ordeal, and I have seen widows break down in complete abandonment ; mothers carried fainting away.

The Altar in Russian churches is hidden by the Ikonastas, or Rood Screen, which holds three doors, the centre of which is called the Royal Door, and only opened on rare occasions. During the service, and behind the sanctuary of these doors, no lay-man was allowed to pass, save the Tsar at the moment of his coronation, or if he wished to place an offering on the Altar.

The domes that surmount the churches represent Our Lord in the centre, and the smaller domes, either the four Evangelists, or, when there are twelve of them, the Twelve Apostles, while the cupolas of odd shapes that surmount them signify the flames of candles burning before the Divine Majesty. The ringing of church bells is said to frighten away the devil, and one can imagine Satan having had a very bad time in Petersburg or Moscow where the air seemed constantly to echo to the jubilant music of bells.

Many other services in Russian churches come back to me. The First Sunday in Lent, called Anathema Sunday, when the priest solemnly curses the memory of all rebels such as the False Dimitri, Stenka Razin or Emile Pougatcheff. The midnight service on Easter Eve, when the churches and squares and streets outside were thronged with worshippers, all holding little flickering candles, when the long rows of Easter cakes were blessed, and at midnight the priest opened the great doors, announcing in a joyful voice to those who waited, "He is Risen." Whereupon all the bells in the city broke into clamorous jubilation, the cannons thundered from the fortress, and the people turned

to kiss each other with the words, "He has Risen indeed." Vespers in a little village church, an old priest in a red and silver cope raising his trembling hands in supplication before the gilt doors of the Ikonastas, men in blue, yellow, red or green shirts standing amidst the shadows, ragged children clinging to the skirts of women with shawls or bright-coloured handkerchiefs over their heads, and through the open window the singing of a nightingale, the distant music of a concertina ; or else an official service in the Khazan Cathedral of Petersburg, attended by dignitaries of the Court, members of the Imperial family and diplomatic body.

The flickering haze of candles, the drifting blue mist of incense, a low, subdued murmur like the whisper of a distant sea, the shifting brilliance of uniforms and jewelled decorations, the perfume of scent and powder, mingling with the smell of incense and melting wax. And then as the royal doors of the Ikonastas swung open, the voice of the priest chanting in the sudden breathless hush, "Glory to the Holy Trinity, One Indivisible, to-day—to-morrow—to all Eternity." Slowly the old man with his white beard, his golden crown and heavy brocaded robes comes down into the church while the deacon with his full, black beard and robe of olive green, precedes him swinging the incense, and the voices of the choir, like the voices coming from some far, unseen, distant paradise, break out into the hundred-and-fourth Psalm. The great doors of the Ikonastas close in symbol of the punishment of man who disobeyed the commands of God and was exiled from Paradise, till, later in the service they open again for the priest to come out once more and stand in silent prayer, and this time the opening of the doors symbolises the re-opening of the Gates of Paradise by the sacrifice of Our Lord.

Full of symbolism, of romance and mysticism is the

Religion of Russia—full of superstition as people say, a statement which cannot be denied, but if superstition can make a Religion so real, so vivid and alive, can one blame it very severely? For always, all day long the churches were open, and, at whatever hour one went, they seemed to be crowded with worshippers come to pray or to place a little yellow candle before the image of a Patron Saint or wonder-working Madonna. Women with shawls over their heads, women in rich furs, old women with lined, sorrowful, work-worn faces, young girls radiant and smiling, here and there a bearded peasant, an officer with a grey overcoat, an old man half asleep, some children stretching up to place their votive candle and make their little prayer; so sure of its being fulfilled because that candle burnt before the Holy Image, that one's heart was stirred to a sudden swift emotion.

Blindly the people still believe in miracles, the omnipotence of the Saints, the power of wonder-working ikons to heal their ailments, and grant their wishes. Among the most celebrated of these are the Virgin found in Khazan in 1597, removed to Moscow and finally brought to Petersburg in 1760, the Virgin of Vladimir in the Uspensky Cathedral at Moscow, the Virgin of the Don and the Iberian Virgin, copied from the celebrated picture in the monastery on Mount Athos, a few other ikons of Saints—St. Nicholas, the wonder-working Saint of Russia, St. George, St. Helena, St. Xenia. Found sometimes through the dreams or visions of monks, these ikons were looked on with the utmost reverence, covered sometimes with jewels and offerings from those who had been granted their prayers.

Now under the excuse of feeding the starving population the Bolsheviks have despoiled the churches of all their

treasures, have broken up the jewelled ikons, taken away the gold plate, the silver chased cups and chalices, ostensibly with the intention of exchanging them for grain and corn to be sent to the famine districts. But whether those provisions or that money ever reached the starving people, or whether it went to feed the enormous system of propaganda which the Bolsheviks have organised all over the world is the question that has often been asked and to which there is never any definite answer.

And yet even the Bolshevik Government, with its limitless power, has reason sometimes to fear the wonder-working ikon. I was told a story a little time ago which shows how the spirit of mysticism still stirs in Russia under the rule of tyranny and terror ! Every year on the Feast-day of St. Nicholas there had been a procession to the Nicholas Gate in Moscow, where the Holy Image had been miraculously spared when the Gate was ruined in Napoleon's attempt to blow up the Kremlin. Under the Bolsheviks the procession had been stopped, but last year the people sent a special petition asking to hold it once more, and afraid of rousing a religious outcry, the Government reluctantly gave their consent, and made careful preparations beforehand, draping a huge red flag over the gateway, thus entirely hiding the Holy Ikon from sight.

The procession arrived in due course, and the Religious service began, severely watched by the soldiers of the new army on guard all round. Then suddenly though it was a grey and windless day and not the smallest breeze stirred in the air, the great, scarlet flag, hung over the gateway, slowly split from top to bottom, falling apart and displaying the ikon to the gaze of the amazed and wondering people, who fell on their knees while the terrified soldiers broke up in panic.

It is certain that the Bolsheviks are finding the Church of Russia harder to overthrow than they did the Empire ; it has been and still is the most insurmountable obstacle in their path, though they are expending every means in their power to lower and debase it in the eyes of the people. With Vedensky, the head of the Church Reform, using Bishop Antonin as their instrument, they have founded innumerable new sects which, seeming to carry out the teachings of the Church, in reality preach the Communist propaganda. The "Living Church," the "Free Labour Church," and the "Russian People's Church," through these they declare to the people that the Bolshevik Revolution follows the Gospel of Christ, and those priests who dare speak against them are imprisoned, banished, or executed without mercy.

So, though originally Christianity was introduced into Russia, without any of the convulsions, persecutions or oppressions that marked its birth in other countries, it is now passing through its supreme trial, and those who know and love Russia wonder sometimes whether the faith of the people will emerge triumphantly or whether it will be dragged down by those men who blaspheme in the Name of Christ.

When Vladimir, Grand Prince of Kiev, was baptised in the Orthodox Faith, Christianity was accepted all over his kingdom and spread with almost miraculous rapidity. But with the invasion of the Mongolian Tartars, who were Shammamites, the Church was baptised in fire, and sanctified by the blood of martyrs. Michael of Tchernigoff, journeying to the Tartar Horde to swear fealty to the Khan, refused to bow his head to the Tartar gods or to pass through the sacred fire, and was murdered with his companion, the Boyarin Theodore. Michael of Tver, accused of plotting against the Tartars, voluntarily delivered himself into their hands to save his people from massacre.

Alexander Nevsky, in his turn journeying to the Golden Horde, resolved to suffer martyrdom rather than abjure his religion, was spared the supreme sacrifice, but gave his life and his strength in one continual struggle for the security of his people and the freedom of the Church. Roman, Prince of Riazan, was tortured and put to death because he refused to embrace the Mohammedan faith to which the Tartars had been converted.

Many others there were—princes and priests who gave their lives, while bowed beneath the terrible Mongol rule the people clung to the comfort of dim churches, and the sweet-faced ikons listened compassionately to their prayers.

Up till the capture of Constantinople by the Turks the Russian Church had been united under the Supreme Patriarch of that city, but in 1589 the Patriarch Job was elected in Moscow, and up till the death of Adrien in 1700 the Tsar and the head of the Church had equal riches and rights, though the Tsar was nominally the head of both Church and State. Among the great Patriarchs of Russia may be cited Hermogenes, starved to death by the Poles, because he refused to withdraw his command ordering the people to fight against the invaders, Philaret, the father of Michael Romanov, and Nikon, who instituting new reforms into the Church brought to a head the great schism or "Raskol," which gave birth to the sect called the Old Believers who still exist in Russia, steadily refusing to acknowledge the new Liturgy.

The famous siege of the Monastery of Solavetz where the monks held out stubbornly for seven years against excommunication and the armies of the Tsar, the harsh treatment of the Old Believers, their exile, their voluntary martyrdom when they built up huge pyres, which they set alight with their own hands, perishing together in the flames

rather than submitting to the Tsar's orders. All these make one wonder at the stubborn resistance which preferred death to making the sign of the Cross with two fingers instead of three, or the new way of spelling the name of Our Lord as Jisus instead of Jesus.

But the tempest of feeling raised throughout the country ended in the abdication of Nikon, and his successors were colourless figures, till finally, with the death of Adrien in the reign of Peter the Great, the Emperor, who cared not at all whether the people called him anti-Christ, allowed the post of Patriarch to lapse, replacing it by the Holy Synod or Ecclesiastical Senate, which, composed of priests and bishops, was governed by a procurator who represented the State, and was the intermediary between the Synod and the Emperor.

Then at last during the Bolshevik Revolution, Tikon was elected Patriarch and in him the spirit of holy Russia seemed to be re-born. Severely reprimanding the Government for the murders committed by their commands, remonstrating with them for the blasphemy of their mock religious processions, certain that the treasures of the Church would be expended in propaganda, he demanded that the relief be administered under the Church's supervision, and was finally forced into retirement and imprisoned.

A woman who had done heroic work in the Bolshevik prisons during the terrible years of 1919, 1920 and 1921, told me a story of him which has remained vividly in my mind.

Forced to leave Russia early this year she managed to send word to the Patriarch that she felt she could not go away without his blessing, and that, at such and such an hour, she would be outside his prison. Coming there at the appointed time she knelt in the snow looking up at the small barred window, which she knew was that of his cell, and

presently through the shadows two hands were raised in Benediction. That was all she saw, for the window in the thick wall was too high for the old man to look out, but nevertheless that woman went away happier for the blessing given by those two trembling hands.

There are many other grand figures that pass across the pages of the history of the Russian Church. The Metropolitan Philip, martyred because he refused to give his public blessing to Ivan the Terrible when the latter entered the church in an unseemly condition. Hilarien the hermit of the caves near Kiev, Anthony the holy monk who carried on his work and founded the famous Lavra Monastery, the Metropolitan Platon, who sought to curb the madness of the Emperor Paul, Father John of Cronstadt, the Metropolitan Benjamin, barbarously executed by the Bolsheviks for refusing to sanctify the plundering of the churches.

And passing among the great figures of holy men there are some, sinister and terrible with the power of evil, such as Rasputin, that debauched and drunken peasant.

A huge, tremendously powerful figure, dressed nearly always in bright-coloured, or finely embroidered silk shirts, velvet breeches and high boots of the softest leather, a face strange and arresting, eyes that probed deeply, that compelled, that seemed lit with fires not human, a voice that for all its untutored commonness could be wonderfully charming. So Rasputin has been described, but who could read or understand the distorted mind, the fits of ungovernable passion, the moments of transported fervour, the reasoning that asserted the right to sin in order to attain the salvation of repentance, the necessity of the benediction of love, the excesses of sensual passion and drunken intoxication? And what was it, the mysterious power of this man, the force that seemed to emanate from him, and subjugated all

with whom he came in contact ? Poor women, old women, young girls, women highly bred, intellectual and refined, seeing in him a holy man, and forgetting the common dirty moujik.

Indisputably the Empress herself was blinded, for her he was almost a saint, endowed with the mysterious power of relieving and curing the little Tsarevitch whose health was a constant and continual anxiety, and obstinately she refused to listen to the many warnings given her.

I read a description the other day of some of the receptions held in Rasputin's house, when crowds of his women devotees gathered together, and he danced and sang and raved in a flood of drunken eloquence. Once in the middle of one of these revelries, he was summoned to the telephone to answer a call from the Palace at Tsarskoe. The message was that the little Tsarevitch had been tortured all day with an agonising earache, that his temperature was rising, and he was tossing feverishly on his bed. Immediately Rasputin, breathless, perspiring and half intoxicated, assumed his grave and compelling voice. " No, no," he said, " Alexis has no earache, tell him to come and speak to me on the telephone." There was silence for a few moments and then Rasputin spoke again. " Is that you Aloucha ? They tell me you have earache but it is not true. It is better now, it is quite gone—do you understand ? You will go to bed and sleep because the pain has quite gone away." A quarter of an hour later the telephone rang again—the little Tsarevitch had complained of no more pain ; his temperature had fallen and he was sleeping peacefully.

Can one wonder that the mother clung to a man who could work such miracles ? That she believed he had been given the Divine gift of healing ?

The story of Rasputin's murder has been told too often

to make it necessary to go over it again, but reading it one wonders if one is not back in the days of the old Rurik princes, of Ivan the Terrible or Boris Godounov, so incredible it seems in our modern time shadowed still by a certain mystery. Done with the highest motive of delivering Russia from a poisonous, pernicious influence, it had, alas, only the effect of hastening the final catastrophe! Had not Rasputin said, "If any harm is done to me the Russian Empire will crumble?"

Mysticism, mystery, the secrets of Russia which no man has yet been able to read! The shadows that gather in the old cathedrals! The eternal melancholy of the chanting of the Volga boatmen, the low mournfulness that underlies the soldier's songs! Can one explain it all, or reason on the whys and wherefores?

A certain hopeless resignation ingrained in the people's nature; a pathetic wistfulness sounding always through even the gayest dance music, while the singing of the church choirs, uplifting and transporting, yet brings the tears to one's eyes, and a sudden aching pain to one's heart whose cause one cannot define.

The Church in the old days looked with disfavour on music, condemning it as a frivolous encouragement of passion, allowing only the ritual chanting of choirs during religious services, or at the performance of mystical plays given in the Tsar's Palace. The first Romanovs introduced the playing of lighter music at Court; Peter the Great sent students to study music in Germany and France, Elizabeth and Catherine encouraged foreign artists of all kinds to come to Russia. Pantomimes, operas, tragedies and ballets were got up, people in society themselves taking part; there were performances nearly every night in the theatre of the Hermitage, public theatres were built

in Petersburg, and French and Italian companies were invited to Russia, and gradually the Russian Ballet grew into being, becoming famous all over the world.

I remember how soon after our arrival in Petersburg we were taken to the Marinsky Theatre to see a performance of the "Sleeping Beauty." Knowing nothing at the time of the art of dancing, I was more interested I think in the audience than in the performance; the four tiers of boxes, the dim, far away gallery, the huge parterre of stalls where artists, musicians, young diplomats, officers in brilliant uniforms, and old, bald-headed generals jostled and pushed, the royal boxes where some members of the Imperial family were always to be seen. It was all of entrancing interest and I strongly resented the etiquette that expected one, during the long *entr'acte*, to retire into the little cabin-like ante-room at the back of one's box where streams of visitors came to chatter and gossip. It was so much more interesting to watch the comings and goings in the stalls, the fat ladies of the rich merchant class in the boxes, munching chocolates brought to them in brightly be-ribboned boxes by men with smooth faces and queer-shaped bald heads, the young girls with beautifully brushed hair who leant over to smile at the officers down below, a few old men grouped together discussing—not politics as one might imagine—but the technique of some dancer's steps, shaking their heads mournfully as they agreed that the true classical art of the ballet was deteriorating.

The big theatre with its decorations of gold and white and blue. If I shut my eyes I can almost see it now, smell the scent of Russian cigarettes, of ambre and chypre and chocolates that always filled it, mingled with the all pervading faint smell of the heating, and of the dust raised by many hundreds of dancing feet. The men in Court uniforms who

unlocked the doors of the boxes, the foyer where, during the *entr'acte*, crowds gathered for refreshments, old men assembling together for a smoke or a drink, old ladies sitting together discussing servants and the price of food, young couples walking up and down, arm in arm, able for a time to evade the parental ear.

On the week-days operas were performed in the Marinsky Theatre ; the special nights for the ballet were Sundays or alternate Wednesdays, and though for the opera one could sit in any part of the house one pleased, for the ballet it was considered highly unseemly to sit anywhere but in the first two tiers of boxes. The prices for the ballet were also more than double, and unless one had one's own box it was almost impossible to get one, and *abonnements* were not always easy to obtain, as some of the boxes were hereditary and were passed on from father to son.

It has been the fashion in England to rave about the Russian dancers, but I wonder how few of the average audiences in London have the slightest conception of the technical qualities of dancing. Often have I seen them wildly applauding a step that, though effective, had no real difficulty, while some movement that required absolute perfection of balance and training passed unnoticed. London has also only seen the light one-act ballets like "Petrouchka," "Carnival," or "The Good-Humoured Ladies"; those long old-fashioned three- or four-act ballets like "The Little Hunchbacked Horse," the "Lac des Cygnes," "Bayadere," or the "Daughter of Pharaoh," would probably bore audiences not knowing the technicalities of ballet dancing ; but in Russia every movement, every gesture was known ; a step just the fraction of a second out of time, a pose whose lines were not absolutely in harmony, and an icy silence

settled over the audience, while thunders of applause would greet the execution of a difficult pirouette.

Trained from their early childhood in the Imperial Ballet School the Russian dancers devote their whole lives to their art with a single-hearted enthusiasm and intensity. Not so easy is it to gain the fleeting lightness that makes them look like bits of thistledown blown across the stage, or to attain the iron strength of perfectly-trained muscles that is required for those Arabesques and Relevés. It means an unceasing endeavour, a never resting persistence of work, hours of strenuous practice every day, continual lessons all the time. Perfection it seems can never be complete, and there is always something more to learn. To have a few weeks' rest is fatal, for the highly-trained muscles relax very quickly, whereas to shirk the daily lesson or class means a certain slackness creeping in, movements becoming ragged and unfinished instead of flowing and soft, the whole effect being blurred instead of exquisitely clear.

Having for a short time gone to the class of that great old man Cechetti, who for years was master of the Imperial Ballet School, I have a faint conception of the incessant effort and strain, the ages of practice required for a dancer. To be graceful and light is not by any means enough; every muscle, every finger, every turn of the head, every expression must be studied, while even the memory must be trained to grasp and retain the many intricate steps and gestures.

Melody and harmony, a poetry that is hard to describe, the rhythm of absolutely perfect movement, a voiceless expression of passing emotions, a haze of shifting colours, blending and moving to exquisite beauty—that is to me the Russian Ballet.

Colour in everything, even on the dullest most sunless of autumn days ; that is the spirit of Russia.

The painted dome of some church, a moujik in a bright green blouse, a gipsy woman in a red and orange shawl, a winter morning of dazzling blue and white and gold, sunsets as flamingly incredible as those of some desert picture glowing on the ice-bound river, the sapphire blue darkness of snow-still nights pressing against the windows. And then, beneath a leaden sky the snow turns to impassable slush, the melting ice drips from the roofs and the frozen Neva stirs and mutters in its sleep. The golden domes gleam sullenly against the sky, a Court carriage with a scarlet-liveried coachman passes, the pink walls of the palace, where the mad Emperor Paul was murdered, rise up above the waste of the Champ de Mars, while on the other side of the leafless elms in the Alexander Garden shine the blue and green and yellow domes of the church which marks the spot where the Emperor Alexander II. fell a victim to a Nihilist's bomb. And slowly the opaque, dun-coloured clouds lift and pass, a soft wind, sweet somehow with the scent of violets, blows through the slush-drowned streets, the ice sighs, shivers and suddenly begins to move on the river and with a rushing impact, a hiss and roar, the great blocks crash against the bridges.

According to old custom the Governor of Petersburg sets out in his painted barge with his sixteen rowers to meet the Governor of the fortress in mid-river. The cannons thunder their tidings that the Neva is free from ice, bluer than the blue sky, the blue waters laugh in the spring sunshine, and the trees in the summer gardens burst into leaf with a sudden rush and hurry. The wooden green-roofed landing stages are deposited all down the quays by little black steamers, small penny passenger steamers come and

go, and fussy-looking tugs draw wooden barges painted blue and green where men in coloured shirts sit idly playing the concertina or singing their endless mournful songs.

The days lengthen into opal coloured twilight, the golden spire of Peter and Paul glows through the summer nights with the red flame of sunset, till the radiance of the sun-rise turns it again to gold.

Mysticism, the childlike faith in the hearts of the people, music that follows one with haunting persistence, colours that arrest and thrill and enrapture ; these are the secret spells Russia casts over one's heart ; with these she holds one, and will not let one forget.



ROOM IN THE KREMLIN.



THE KREMLIN.

CHAPTER XV

THE SPIRIT OF BOLSHEVISM

THE Russia of the Rurik princes, when Kiev the Golden encircled by her white walls, shone like a city of amber and pearl above the yellow Dnieper! Russia, bound and bleeding under the pitiless rule of the Mongolian Tartars! The Russia of the Tsars, when the white walls of the Kremlin enclosed the clustering palaces and churches, the court that was half Monastic and half Eastern! The Russia of the Emperors with a society that copied the cosmopolitan brilliance of Paris! It seems incredible that it has all been swept away, that there is nothing left, and that the Russia that exists to-day is a new Russia, different to anything that has ever gone before.

And what is it that has taken the place of the old Empire? A country that has been ostracised by the great powers of Europe, a country where a tyrannical rule of terror calls itself Communism or the free independence of the people, where religion is debased and children are taught to be lawless and immoral.

People who do not know Russia shrug their shoulders in despair. Why is there no man to lead an organised rising against the Bolsheviks? Why were they not driven from the country before they became all powerful? How could a solitary group of men overthrow a Government, tyrannise and cow into utter subjection a whole people, keep their hold during all these years?

And to all these questions one can only really give the one obscure and indefinite explanation—the mentality and psychology of the Russian people inherited from centuries of oppressions, from a mixture of Oriental blood, and the apathetic fatalism engendered by years of Eastern domination.

The violent upheaval under the reign of Peter the Great, who tried to complete in a life-time the work of a century and left the country breathless, gasping and un-settled in the new conditions he had imposed with such an iron hand.

The erratic, idle governing of Elizabeth, the extravagance of Catherine's Court, the mad tyrannical rule of Paul, the firm autocracy of Nicholas—each in turn had left their impress on the Russian people.

The Ukase passed by Alexander II. liberating the Serfs, did little to ameliorate the situation, aggravated as it was by the growing infection of the Nihilists ; the Terrorists who started the assassination of notable men, the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Social Democrats ; one by one the different secret societies were formed by men with the brains of crazy dreamers and eyes that saw impossible visions.

Always beneath the surface the cauldron of sedition and discontent seethed and boiled, while the oppression of the secret police added to the people's smouldering anger. At any moment might come the dreaded tramp of feet, the thundering knock at the door, the figures in the hated uniforms, and old men, young boys and girls arrested on the faintest suspicion of Nihilist sympathies, dragged off to prison, lost perhaps for ever on the grim roads to Siberia, that land of exile from which so many never returned.

For so long had the Russian people dreamt of liberty, for so long had it been presented to them in glowing colours, for so long had they pictured it and the joys it would bring,

and when it was given them they shattered it to pieces, like a child, who, chasing a butterfly, clutches at the luminous transparent wings, and tears them with eager, ungentle hands.

Liberty! Equality! Fraternity! How could the true meaning of those words penetrate to the poor, untutored minds of men, taxed and beaten by Mongolian tyranny, treated almost as animals, used as cannon fodder, sacrificed mercilessly to the grasping ambition of princes and Emperors, thrown away and wasted in hundreds and thousands by the hopeless inefficiency of some intemperate, self-indulgent general.

The Revolution of March, 1917, cutting the ground from under their feet, leaving nothing stable or firm, sent them drifting helplessly like a flock of sheep without a leader, ready to assimilate the Bolshevik propaganda which promised the realisation of all the dreams that had been in their minds for centuries.

Can one wonder that they followed blindly? That, caught up in the flood, they were swept away, infected by the madness of destruction, unable to reason, blind and drunk and insane.

In 1918 or 1919 there was a picture in the Academy called "The Bolshevik." It portrayed just simply a man's head and shoulders against a huge red flag that spread itself out behind him, as if driven by the same fanatical fury that possessed the man himself, with his wide-open mouth and blood-shot crazy eyes. I remember the shudder that went, through me as I stopped before that picture, for that man was not a phantom illusion the painter had wrought out of his own imagination.

I had seen that same face with its scrubble of dirty beard, its evil eyes alight with the maniac flame of fanaticism, thrust

into the open door of the motor demanding in hoarse, threatening tones that we should alight. I had seen it lit up by the flickering flames of the fires at street corners, scowling ferociously from under a greasy fur cap. I had seen it, even as in the picture, convulsed by the fury of oratory. I had stood and listened to the words that poured from those crazy lips, and I had watched the effect on the listening crowd of the speech, that called on the proletariat of the world to overthrow the existing order of things, to wade in the blood of men, women and children, to strike without pity or compassion, to march onwards through ruin and havoc, to overthrow religion and laws, capitalism and education ; to devastate, to massacre, and build a new world for the workmen from the smoking, blood-soaked ruins of the old.

That man's face typified the spirit of Bolshevism. For him neither sanity nor common sense existed. He was swept away by the torrent of his own eloquence, and the world was all lit up by the fierce light of his own madness, red as the scarlet flag that blew out behind him, crazy and insane as those theories he expounded, as those pictures of a world governed by Communism and equal liberty.

The Spirit of Bolshevism ! The word that only seven years ago had never been heard of, that represents a force greater than armies. The word that is the bitter enemy of civilisation and progress. Bolshevism ! Sweeping away the new Democratic Government as well as the old autocracy, crouching, a grey wolf on the crumbling ruins with bared fangs and red-rimmed eyes, that watch and wait, insatiable, pitiless, unsleeping.

Little did Europe guess the full significance of the Russian Revolution ! At first only a whisper in the air, then a growing unrest, a low, underworld thunder that

communicated itself in a sense of strange, feverish restlessness, a spirit of unusual activity. Cloudless days of brilliant winter sunshine, everybody keyed up to a breathless expectation for the opening of the Duma, when it was rumoured that a great rising of the people was to take place, for which the Government was preparing with patrols of fully armed Cossacks, with hidden machine guns, and forces of police. In a quiet, unbroken and breathless, the day came and went, and yet, though many pretended that the danger was over, the sense of strain continued, till, less than a fortnight later, the storm broke with an overwhelming force, the thunder of falling masonry, the clash and clatter of breaking chains.

Arriving back from the unconscious peace of the country, where no whisper had reached us of the stormy days of shooting in the capital, and plunged suddenly into the breathless succession of tremendous happenings, it is perhaps the drive from the station in the early morning that stands out the most clearly in my mind.

It is very often the space of time just before a catastrophe that seems impregnated with the force of the hours whose actions are still hidden in the darkness of the future, and on the morning of March 12, 1917, the storm had not yet broken in all its violence, but the deathly silence of the waiting city was a thing never to be forgotten.

There were the same wide streets, the same great, solemn palaces, the same gold spires and domes rising out of the frozen, pearl-tinted mists, and yet all somehow abnormal, weird, held in a spell of baleful stillness. And everywhere emptiness! No lines of toiling carts, no shrieking, yellow trams up the Nevski, no little ambling sledges across the great, white emptiness of the Palace Square. And then, as we turned out into the Palace Quay, the solitary figure of the policeman who always was on guard at this corner stood

out in dark and sinister significance in the waste of deserted streets and ice-bound river. Round him the utter silence, behind him on the opposite shore the low, grim walls of the fortress and the Imperial flag of Russia, that for the last time fluttered against the winter sky.

Later during that day all the policemen found by the crowd were brutally done to death, and the white, fixed face of that one man who, from his old post, had saluted us as we passed, haunted me with a dreadful persistence—symbol as he was of the old order that had gone for ever, of the Russia we had known, swept away in the cataclysm of this new power whose strength was a thing still unguessed at—he must have known, as he buckled on his uniform in the grey darkness of that early morning the danger that was threatening, the temper of the crowd, savage with the memory of countless wrongs to be avenged. Did he kiss his wife and did she wait for him in vain through the long hours of that memorable day?

One man amidst millions! What did he count for after all? One little atom blown along the road to Eternity by the fierce gale of Revolution! The red flag had replaced the Imperial Standard on the fortress, and the Emperors, buried in the white and gold cathedral, must have stirred in their sleep, hearing the rattle of machine guns across the Neva. An icy wind that drove down the quays, a flurry of snow, flitting figures that ran in the shadows, the crack of rifles, the hoarse sound of cheering, the mighty crash of falling monarchy—that was the Revolution of March 1917—but the word Bolshevik was still an unknown terror.

That was to come later. Mentioned at first with a half scornful shrug of the shoulders, a passing smile as the meaning was explained—the greater or the larger party, the

more extreme Socialists, distinguished so from the Mensheviki or lesser party.

A handful of crazy fanatics exiled from Russia for their revolutionary ideas, the riff-raff of political prisons, come through Germany in a mysterious train with sealed doors and windows !

It was a story that did credit to a sensational melodrama or cinema. What harm could these wild men do to the great realm of Holy Russia ?

But the soldiers, now that there was no Emperor to fight for, now that there was no figure-head to look up to, no order and discipline to keep them together, wandering like straying children demoralised and idle, were ripe for the insidious Bolshevik propaganda, and already something malignant and sinister seemed to hover on the horizon like a hideous bird of prey, something wicked and baneful grinned from the red flags fluttering from all the windows, something that was grim and horrible lurked in shadowed doorways, and crept on noiseless feet behind one down the streets.

Slowly, gradually, almost imperceptibly that consciousness of evil seemed to grow, the phantom of threatening wings spread an enormous shadow across the sky, the name one had questioned and smiled at became one of menace and terror, the madness it bred was to be read plainer and plainer in the sullen faces of the workmen and soldiers, in the growing discourtesy that encountered one on all sides, in the half-veiled threats that followed one, the looks of ominous hate one met and tried to avoid.

For so long had the lower classes cowered under the power of supreme autocracy ; inbred in them through the centuries were the remains of countless acts of injustice, of endless sufferings. Now they could throw back the insults, they could refuse to obey the tentatively made

requests, they could assert their independence ! They were beginning to realise the power of this new freedom. Like a savage animal released from captivity, they stretched themselves a moment, uncertain still how to use their strength.

And at every street corner there were orators expounding their heresies ; every day, every hour there were meetings with speeches that fanned the ever increasing frenzy. A burning stream of words growing to a devastating flood, breaking down the bridges and bulwarks of reason, sweeping away the credulous, easily swayed peasant minds of the army.

For Bolshevism is essentially a doctrine easily preached, a theory that clothes itself in glowing colours, a policy with a number of catchwords that make it full of bombastic promises for future well being. The untutored minds of the people reaching out of their darkness, caught and clung to those resplendent promises, the assurance that bread would be plentiful, that the war would finish speedily, that there would be equal land, riches and liberty for all. How the miracle was to be accomplished, or how, once accomplished, the country was to be governed, they did not ask, carried away as they were by that blazing oratory, madness catching fire alike in the eyes of those that spoke and those that listened. And every day the terror that skulked in the shadows grew more distinct ; every day the shops grew emptier, the horses thinner, the drivers more surly, more exorbitant in their demands.

A weight of silence seemed to stifle the activity of the city, the people passing glanced at each other half fearfully, as if always expecting a hidden enemy to confront them with a brandished revolver, and never on any face did one see a smile, never down the wide, grey streets did one hear the echo of a laugh, always one felt, with an indefinable

sense of oppression, that one was in the presence of death.

The growing filth of the streets, and here a window that was broken, a lamp-post that had been knocked down, a paving stone that had been displaced, a cart without a wheel that lay on the side of the road, a heap of rubbish thrown from a window which nobody had troubled to remove. Soldiers slouching everywhere, their uniforms in varying stages of dirt and disorder, armed workmen who growled out unspeakable insults as they passed, guards with fixed bayonets challenging one at every corner. And, when night came, covering spire and dome and palace, no lamps to light the dense, enveloping darkness, and now and then, in the silence, a shot, a sudden, hunted cry of pain and fear, the rattling bark of a machine gun, the roar of a passing motor with shaded lights bristling with evil-looking bayonets, bent on God knows what errand of destruction—and with it all always the sense of implacable evil whose full force of devastation was yet to come.

That was early in 1918. The two years that followed were years of such nightmare hideousness as the world has seldom seen.

First came the darkness, the electricity completely cut off, no gas, no oil for lamps, and presently no wax for candles. Occasionally people were able to fabricate little glimmering lights made of cork or flax, but for the most part during the endless winter evenings, stretching into the grey mornings, the citizens of Petersburg cowered in their rooms staring with aching eyes into the blackness where visions of horror painted themselves, driving many to raving madness.

Then came the cold. The perfect system of heating which had made Russian houses so marvellously comfortable even on the most bitter winter days, long ago fallen into dis-repair, through neglect and lack of fuel. The price

of wood beyond all reason, books, papers, old photographs burnt to produce a momentary glow, people living wrapped up in fur coats and high felt boots, water pipes freezing and bursting and nobody to mend them, windows very often broken by bullets or the wanton love of destruction of the Red Guards, making their frequent requisitions for arms or incriminating documents.

Then, grim and terrible, striking despair and fear into all hearts came hunger, with disease following close behind.

I don't think we can really have any conception of what that hunger meant. The Government had started communal kitchens, where the citizens, divided into four sections received their daily ration according to their class. The first class of the workmen or factory hands received the highest portion, the fourth class in which were reckoned the bourgeois, the proprietors and merchants, received the least—a small piece of black bread, one salted fish that was generally uneatable, sometimes a cup of tepid greasy water that was given the courtesy title of soup.

A Russian girl told me that once, having occasion to go and see one of the Bolshevik leaders, she was told to wait in the kitchen, that being the fit place for one of the hated bourgeois.

Her father had died of starvation a few days earlier, she herself was faint from long weeks of hunger, and waiting in the kitchen, till the great man condescended to receive her, she watched the white-capped chef preparing his dinner. A steaming soup of vegetables, ham, potatoes, things that all seemed to belong to another world? She told me that she had not believed it was possible to suffer such physical agony as well as such mental rage as she endured during those hours of waiting, watching those dishes being prepared, thinking of her dead father, her mother, who was

growing daily weaker, her own hunger, driven to maddened acuteness by the smell of food.

In forcing Communism and the nationalisation and monopoly of all industries on Russia, the Bolsheviks themselves took care not to suffer from their principles, abandoning Petrograd like rats leaving a sinking ship, taking refuge in the Kremlin at Moscow, surrounding themselves with every comfort. And meanwhile the horses died by hundreds and were cut up as they fell ; cats, dogs, the very pigeons and sparrows were killed and eaten. People passed each other unseeing, their eyes fixed in the pale stare of hunger, swaying as they walked, too weak to get up again, if stumbling they lost their footing and fell.

But even the famine was not enough of suffering. To add to the despair and misery there was the dreaded Cheka, or Extraordinary Commission, formed by the inhuman Dzerzhinsky, a sort of secret police to fight any counter-revolutionary movement. So perfect was the system of espionage organised that the very walls had ears, and people hardly dared look at each other lest some agent of the Cheka should creep up behind them, interpret in that look some hidden meaning, drag them off to prison, have them shot most likely after a mock trial in which they would not be allowed to defend themselves.

The ghastliness of those Bolshevik prisons cannot be described ; the swarm of vermin that covered the walls and flung themselves on each new arrival, crawling over him in a few seconds in one moving mass ; the lack of space, the unspeakable dirt and smell, the famine and disease.

Whatever the faults of Russia had been, and however greatly the upper classes had sinned, surely they paid in full and over-flowing measure during those years of terror and despair, when the soul of the whole country was

baptised in fire, and God seemed to have forgotten His People.

The Revolutionaries themselves, the great patriots, who had suffered for their Liberal ideas, turned in horror from the orgy of blood and terror of the Bolshevik régime. Madam Brechko Brechkovskai—known as the Grandmother of the Revolution—returning from her long exile in Siberia, only to fly to Osmk and die of a broken heart ; Prince Kropotkin, imprisoned at seventy-six by the men who had desecrated his ideals of Liberty, and many others, exiled, imprisoned or condemned to death, for trying to preach moderation to men like Trotsky, Zenoviev or Dzerzhinsky.

But even the Bolsheviks had to see that it was impossible to govern by absolute communism. Lenin, the master brain, the only one perhaps who had any real ideals, acknowledged the failure with a certain grim bitterness. Now food can be procured again, though at exorbitant prices. In Moscow and Petersburg the shops are open, the restaurants crowded, the electric light restored, the roads repaired. People, knowing nothing of the real Russia, go there for a time, and come back full of admiration for the restoration of trade and commerce, the wonderful organisation of the schools, the music and lights, the high ideals of liberty and equality.

And the Bolsheviks laugh at the simplicity of these foreigners who allow themselves to be deceived with such consummate ease. They have been shown just exactly what it pleased the Government they should see. The G.P.U.—or State Political Department, which is but the Cheka under a new name—spies on their every movement with indefatigable persistence. Apparently they are at liberty to go anywhere they like, but in reality their steps are carefully watched, and though they may not know it,

they are virtually prisoners. Every word they speak is recorded, they are only allowed to see the people who are considered desirable, and if by accident they come in contact with any person who might betray the true state of affairs, the latter is immediately removed by the G.P.U., and some plausible excuse is given for their sudden disappearance.

Europe has not yet been able to realise the crafty wiliness, the evil force of these men who have taken possession of Russia. When we invite them to Conferences, when we shake hands with them, treat them as lions and celebrities, do we utterly forget that, by their orders the Tsar and his family were brutally murdered, shot down in a way that should brand them with eternal shame? Have we forgotten the memory of the Empress's sister, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, who, after the assassination of her husband the Grand Duke Serge, entered a convent and devoted her whole life to the care of the sick and the ailing, the poor and the unhappy! Do we no longer remember how she and the young Grand Dukes who were with her died? Have we forgotten the murder of Captain Cromie in the British Embassy, and the shameful desecration of his body? And are we foolish enough to believe that the men who did these things can ever be trusted or considered? That they will ever give up their far-reaching propaganda, their secret hope of a World Revolution?

And yet, cowering under the grim rule of tyrannical despotism, Russia is not yet dead. Kolchak, Denikin, Wrangel have been defeated, but now and then an attempt to overthrow the Government flares up spasmodically, bullets scream and whistle down the streets, armed peasants turn out to fight the red soldiers, Cossacks ride into the village and shoot or hang the Bolshevik Commissaries. Men and women have sacrificed their lives in heroic and hopeless attempts to

kill Lenin or Trotsky, and every time reprisals, so hideous that they shatter the people's courage, are the punishment. Then the prisons are crowded again, the war on Religion becomes intensified, and the problem of Russia more insolvable than ever.

Kiev with her golden gates, Moscow with her churches and palaces, Petersburg, built by one man's endeavour, was it for this they were made beautiful? For a handful of Jews and foreign outcasts? For men who deride Religion, and teach their children to defy laws and morality, poisoning the minds of the growing generation with the subtle doctrines of atheism and depravity?

Will not the dead rise from their graves to deny it? Round the silver sarcophagus that holds the skull of Vladimir at Kiev, round the coffins of the Tsars in the Kremlin, in the Fortress Cathedral of Petersburg where those other Emperors lie at rest, do not the shadows gather? Do not ghostly voices whisper, does not the sound of wailing echo out into the night, do not pale candles glimmer in the darkened windows frightening the men who say there is no God?

And the Emperor with the rough face of iron, the fierce eyes and mighty powerful hands, is the grave deep enough to hold him? Does the silence of death wrap him close enough for his unquiet spirit not to hear the voice of his country calling in her bitter need? The great Tsar Peter, surely one day he will rise from the grave and summon those other mighty shadows of history to follow him.

Vladimir, the little Red Sun of Russia, Yaroslav the Wise and Alexander Nevski, Elia Muramets, Stenka Razin, Michael Skopin Schouiski, Dimetri of the Don, the Butcher Cosmo Minin, Prince Pozharsky, Marshall Munich perhaps, and old Suvoroff with his rasping voice! They will all ride out in battle array in the defence of Holy Russia.

It may be that some day indeed that phantom army will ride along with a living army, and the old banner of St. George, or perhaps the double-headed eagle will replace that flaunting scarlet flag that flies above the Kremlin. But that day is not yet, and who knows when, or how, or in what manner it will come.

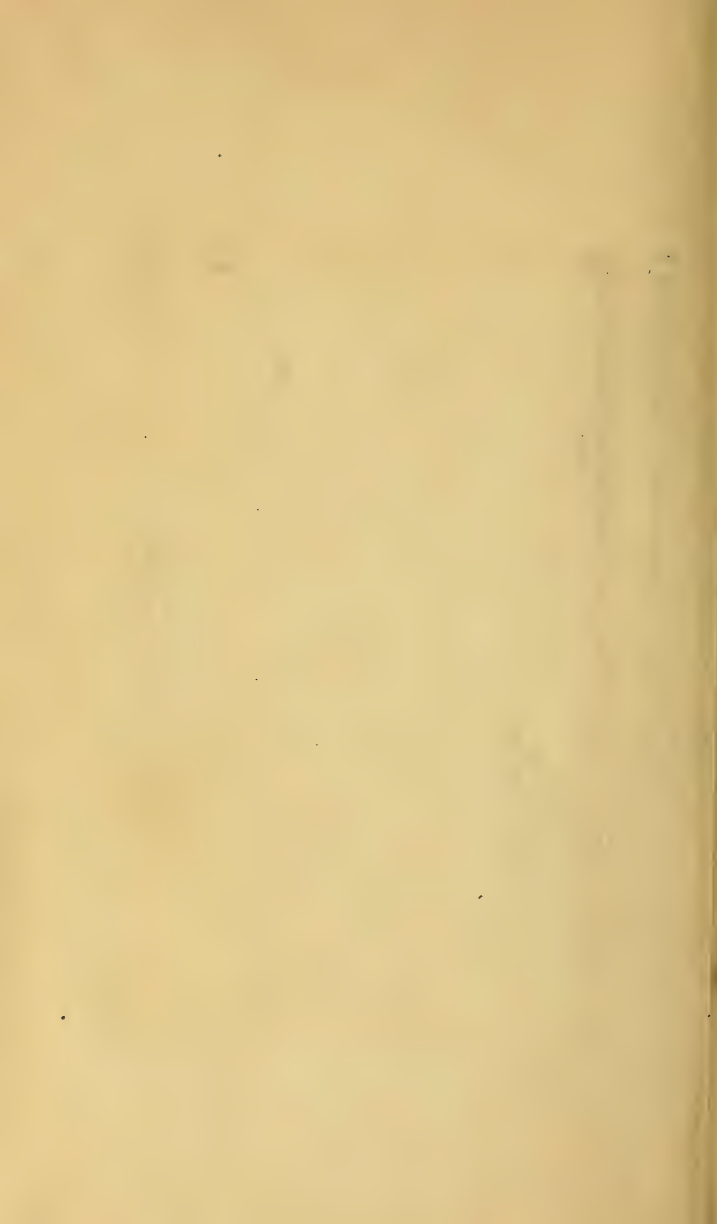
But could the great Tsar Peter come once more to the city he raised from the swamps, "the window towards Europe" he built for his unwilling people, and see her ruined disrepair, her silent desolation, abandoned as she is by the Government, I think his heart would break at the uselessness of all human endeavour.

A city of ghosts, of lost hopes and fallen splendours, of constant disorders and riots, of dirt and squalor, and sordid misery. This is Petrograd to-day, the Petersburg of the past.

If the spirit of the dead Emperor wandered down those silent streets, past the deserted churches, the empty warehouses, out on to the wide quays with the mournful palaces, would he not cry out to the Neva, to rise and submerge this town of haunting, tragic memories, leaving only above the waters the slender spire of St. Peter and St. Paul pointing towards Heaven, as the faith of the Russian people rises still, a golden flame above the dark waters of Bolshevism.

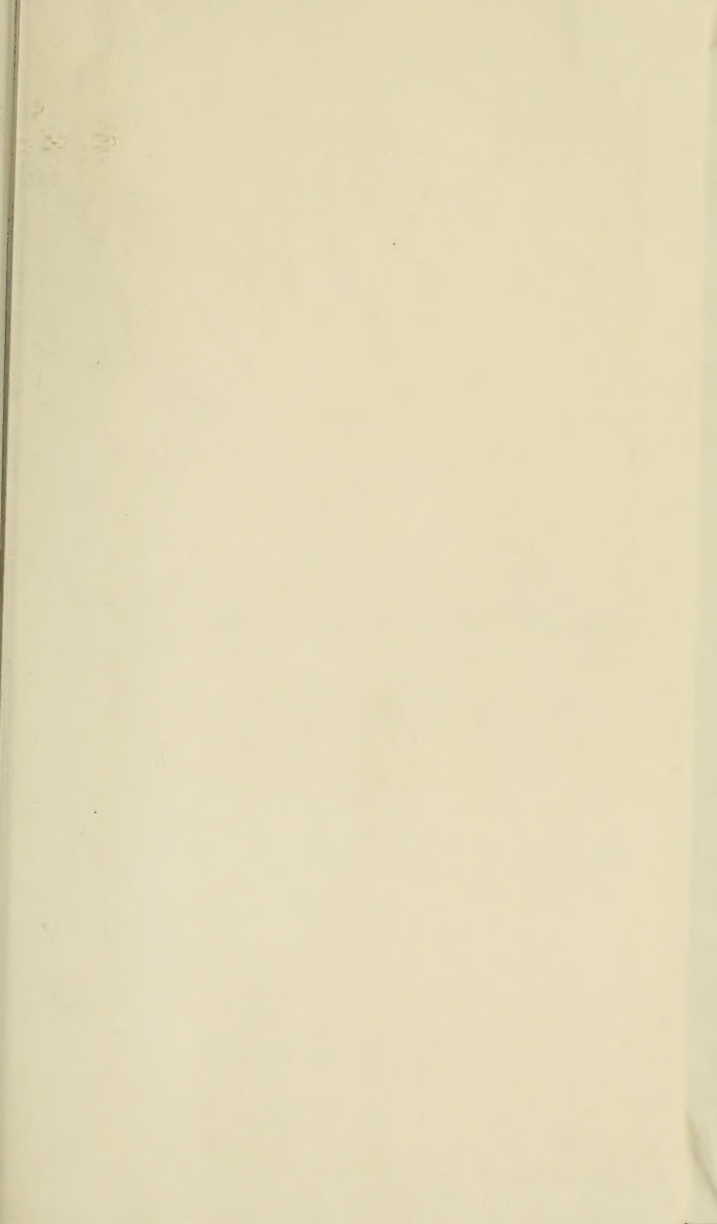
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